

# Tech Reviews

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## Hi There Solutions

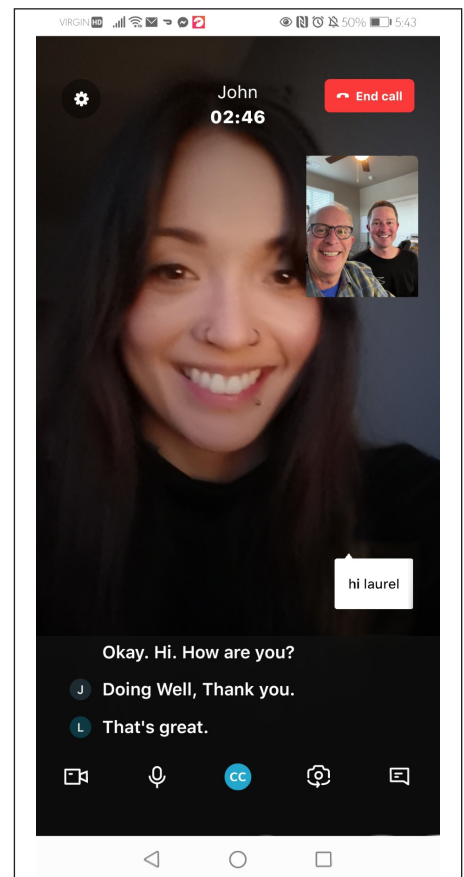
BY LAUREL PALMER

The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced a multitude of lifestyle challenges, and communication has been no exception to this. Not only have plexiglass barriers and masks impeded the way we verbally interact, but the transition to more frequent virtual communication has highlighted a scarcity in resources available to help navigate this change. This has been especially taxing for the Deaf and hard of hearing community.

Hi There Solutions, a start-up based out of Colorado in the United States, recognised this problem and answered with the multifunctional mobile app, *Hi there!!!*. Chase Prieve, Founder of the company, has direct ties to the Deaf and hard of hearing community through his family, and works closely with his father, John Prieve, who has severe hearing loss himself.

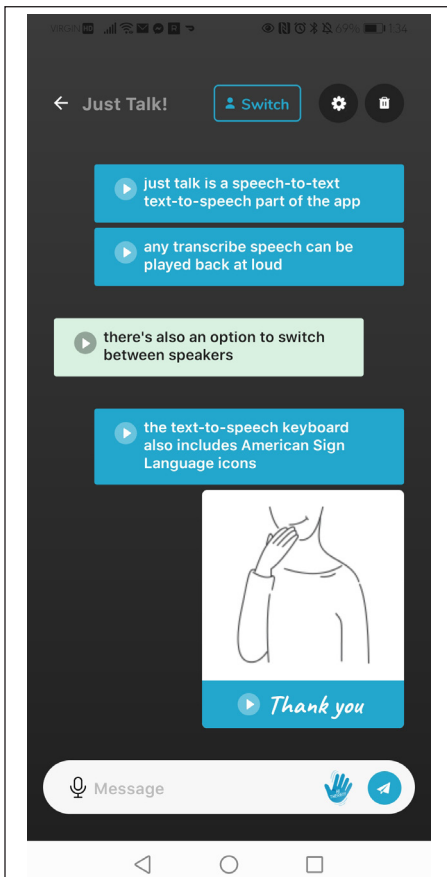
Through the app, users can take part in video-calls with one another, and real-time closed-captioning of the conversation is provided in a scrollable text box. Colour and size of the caption font is customisable to suit user preference. A chat function is also accessible during the call, with messages appearing in speech bubbles in the video chat. Everything is well labelled and the layout makes navigating between functions straightforward, making *Hi There!!!* user friendly, even for the less technologically inclined.

In terms of functionality, the video quality is good with no noticeable lag. Captions are largely accurate and are comparable with other apps that I have tried with adequate speech-to-text capabilities. Any errors were typically minor and did not obstruct the intended message. Background noise did not infringe on captioning when tested in restaurant noise, although a loud, nearby speaker did. Bluetooth headphones remediate this problem; however, amplification users may have variable experiences depending on whether their devices use built-in microphones or phone microphones for streaming calls. Speech from multiple conversation partners on one end of the call are sufficiently parsed, but the



captions can become hard to keep up with. One key drawback is that chat transcription is not available for review once the call ends, though this seems to be due to privacy concerns.

The app will be available in 10 languages at launch, so it will be available to a wide variety of users. Annual subscriptions must be purchased in order to use the app, but with the basic plan being \$23.99 (around £18) annually, pricing is fairly competitive in comparison to other captioning apps that I am familiar with. Premium subscriptions also include access to a secondary built-in product, *Just Talk!*, which converts text-to-speech and speech-to-text, so you have access to two products in one subscription.



Being subscription-based, however, may also be the app's largest limitation, as both the caller and receiver will need to purchase a subscription in order to use the service. While this means the app is not ideal for infrequent or one-time interactions, it remains a worthwhile option for anyone experiencing persistent communication issues, along with their frequent communication partners.

Overall, I see a lot of value in this technology. While video calling has become a much more common method of communication, options that include real-time captions from a mobile phone are quite limited. *Hi There!!!* offers this technology in a user-friendly and reasonably priced format, useful to anyone using a mobile phone. Hi There Solutions is hoping to evolve *Hi There!!!* into a comprehensive, communication resource hub designed specifically with the Deaf and hard of hearing community in mind. This is definitely an exciting step for virtual communication in general, but an especially important step forward for the Deaf and hard of hearing community, and something I can see a good portion of my patient's benefiting from.

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