# Visual Interpreting Service Comes to USU Through IDRPP



USU student Elli Price uses the Aira app at the USU Campus Store.

Aira, a visual interpreting app that provides services for the blind and low-vision community, is now available for students, faculty, and staff at USU. Access to the app is made possible through a one-year pilot program funded by the Institute for Disability Research, Policy, & Practice (IDRPP) within the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services.

Elli Price, a USU master's student studying social work, is not a new user of Aira (pronounced EYE-rah). She used it as a student at Brigham Young University-Idaho before she came to Utah State University in Fall 2024 to work on her master's degree. Aira allows her and other users to use their phones and computers to receive professional visual interpreting services 24/7.

The app was a game-changer in her undergrad days. Price remembers a time when she had an assignment she couldn't have completed without the service. It required using a feature in her software that she didn't even know existed. The service's interpreter walked her through it, and with that help she was able to turn her assignment in on time.

"The world is not made for blind people," she said. "You're going to run into barriers all the time." Price has used the app to navigate a parking lot, for example. "It gives me the confidence to go places that I wouldn't otherwise."

Before coming to USU, Price paid for the visual interpreting app out-of-pocket. Now, she can use Aira at Utah State University's Logan campus free of charge, thanks to the one-year pilot program funded by IDRPP.

The Aira app provides free assistance as Price navigates buildings and crosswalks, reads product labels, accesses information on digital screens inside buildings, buys chocolate at the campus store, and much more.

In addition to addressing logistical challenges, she and other students, staff members, and faculty within the low-vision community may call trained Aira visual interpreters to receive assistance on online tasks related to the university or its website, such as doing research for a class or getting information from a print textbook. Assistance is also available whether the user is at home or anywhere off-campus.

USU is the first university in Utah to become an Aira access partner. The one-year pilot program continues until February 2026 while IDRPP gathers data on its use.

"Interestingly, every year for a National Science Foundation project, I have to gather data on the students here on campus," said IDRPP Executive Director Matthew Wappett. "There has been a huge increase just over the past year of students who are blind or visually impaired. I think in 2023 we had seven or eight, and this year we have 52." That number does not include faculty or staff members who are blind or visually impaired.

Wappett is not sure why the numbers this year are so much higher—if it's an actual change or a change in reporting. In any case, it's important for people with visual impairments to know about this resource.

Aira works like this: A user contacts the Aira hotline by tapping a button from the app. The trained visual interpreter who takes the call then accesses the caller's phone camera. The visual interpreter is then able to describe, narrate, navigate, or read aloud to assist in whatever way is needed. Aira is available anytime, and advance notice is not required.

"Most people don't have friends and family at their beck and call 24/7," said Price. "[And] most of the time when you need assistance from somebody, it's on their terms." With the Aira app, Price is able to receive as much or as little help as she wants, and she is in control. "I'm just glad that Aira's at Utah State."

Aira explorers can download the app on Google Play and iOS. They can also use the web version of the app. For best results, students, faculty, and staff at USU should log onto the EduRoam wifi network because it provides the most reliable data coverage.

To watch the app in action, watch this video. Tips for
getting the most out of the app can be found on Aira's
Instagram channel. Learn more about the Aira app at USU
here.