



Digicel



ASSISTING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES DURING COVID-19 AND BEYOND

COVID-19 has caused unprecedented levels of disruption for everyone as our mobility has been restricted, we are forced to stay at home and our financial situation has become uncertain. Sadly, this is the situation most people with disabilities experience every day.

Thankfully, technology has made it possible to provide solutions for our mobility challenges and for some of the difficulties people with disabilities face. The Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU), in collaboration with the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (TATT), Digicel and the Trinidad and Tobago Association for the Hearing Impaired (TTAHI), is working with a global organisation, VTCSecure, to introduce the Caribbean Video Assistance Service (CVAS) for the Deaf and Blind, firstly to Trinidad and Tobago and then to other Caribbean countries.

A CVAS pilot, a first for this type of service in the Caribbean, will be launched on Monday 4th May 2020.

CVAS will enable those who are deaf or hard of hearing, who use sign language, to communicate with hearing persons via a sign language interpreter (Agent) or those who are blind to receive assistance from those same agents when they need the help of someone who can see.

Ms. Bernadette Lewis, Secretary General of the CTU, acknowledged that this important project was only made possible through the extensive collaboration of many diverse stakeholders. She stated, "The CTU believes in the power of technology to transform lives and, more so, the lives of people with disabilities. And, given the COVID-19 pandemic, CVAS could not have come at a more critical time. CVAS will enable the Deaf to connect and communicate with the universe of hearing persons and to provide sight services for the Blind. This service will be very useful for these communities in these difficult times. These communities can access CVAS via the Internet using a computer or mobile devices."

Ms. Cynthia Reddock Downes, Chief Executive Officer (Ag) of TATT, said that TATT is pleased to be a collaborative partner in this exercise as support for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) is a part of the Authority's mandate under its Universal Service responsibility.

She said in February 2020, "the Authority launched its pilot universal service initiative to subsidise the cost of mobile handsets with assistive features to persons who are visually and/or hearing impaired. This project allows a PWD to register at the Authority and upon approval, directly visit the retail outlet of their preferred service provider to select their smart mobile device.

The Authority sees this as an excellent opportunity for the recipient to utilise the CVAS application on their new mobile device to access the assistive service."

Liam Donnelly, General Manager of Digicel Business, expressed Digicel's support for the CVAS soft launch, "Since our inception, Digicel has led the charge in closing the digital divide and providing a world where no one is left behind despite their personal circumstances. As the region's leading communication and entertainment enabler, Digicel believes in the power of technology and we are proud to be part of the development and roll out of this truly world-class initiative. Projects like CVAS, allow us to stay true to our mission of being the catalyst for improving lives by providing reliable, simple and innovative solutions. Our team worked on this for quite some time and will continue to work with the other partners to ensure that CVAS users are given the best experience powered by the best technology. Digicel applauds the team at the CTU for creating and delivering this pilot".

Ms. Becky Copeland, CEO VTCSecure, added, "As a global leader in communication access for people with disabilities, VTCSecure is pleased and excited to partner with the CTU to introduce CVAS to improve the lives of those who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing and the Blind in the Caribbean."

A soft launch will take place over the course of the first two weeks of the six-month pilot, during which persons who are Deaf and Blind will be invited to test the service to ensure that it is fully functional prior to opening up the service to the general public. The Deaf and the Blind are encouraged to make extensive use of the service during the pilot as their feedback will enable the CTU to improve the service.

The CTU's fervent hope is for CVAS to be available in every Caribbean country as soon as possible. For more information on CVAS, please contact Trevor Prevatt on 1-868-628-0281, ext. 234 or via email at trevor.prevatt@ctu.int.

About the CTU

The Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU) is an inter-governmental organisation dedicated to supporting the development of the Caribbean information and communications technologies (ICT) sector. The CTU also promotes coordination of ICT at the regional level, identifies and removes roadblocks to ICT development, keeps track of industry progress and responds to the needs of the ICT sector, all with the aim of creating a cohesive regional approach to an ICT agenda which embraces the needs of all stakeholders. The CTU is committed to ICT development that reaches the citizens of the region, creating affordable access to ICT and helping citizens to use ICT effectively to transform their lives.

About Digicel Group

Digicel Group is a total communications and entertainment provider with operations in 31 markets throughout the Caribbean, Central America and Asia Pacific. Digicel also runs a host of community-based initiatives across its markets, including Digicel Foundations in Haiti, Jamaica, Papua New Guinea and Trinidad and Tobago which focus on educational, cultural and social development programmes.

Visit www.digicelgroup.com for more information.

About VTCSecure

VTCSecure, LLC is a global company that provides On-Demand, Video, Voice & Text Call Center Services that are secure and accessible from any device. VTCSecure is known to be experts in their field and have focused their efforts to improve communication and technology in the disability community with applications and solutions specifically focused for deaf, hard of hearing, deaf/blind and blind persons.