Alisha Merritt iCanConnect profile

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**iCanConnect Helps Single Mom Communicate with Her Children, Family and Friends**

Not too long ago, Alisha Merritt felt isolated from her four children, grand kids, family and friends. The 41-year-old single mother from Louisa, Virginia really struggled to communicate with those around her.

“I have Usher syndrome and up until five years ago, I dealt mostly with severe hearing loss and issues with night vision,” said Alisha. Then when her son Jacob was in preschool, she began losing her vision in earnest. By the time Jacob was in kindergarten, she had to turn in her driver’s license.

“It happened so fast,” she said. “I couldn't help with school work or read books to my kids anymore. I wasn’t able to read the mail so I had to ask them to read it for me. I couldn’t write letters to send back to family members like I used to do. I stopped being able to communicate. It really impacted my life and I had to rely on my kids so much more.”

One person who has always been there for Alisha is her older sister, who also has Usher syndrome. “She’s been a big help and an invaluable guide as I navigate my way through life with this progressive disease,” said Alisha. “She’s the one who told me about iCanConnect and suggested I reach out to the Virginia Department for the Blind & Vision Impaired, who then put me in contact with my local iCanConnect contact.”

Once Alisha’s application was processed, her local iCanConnect representative visited her at home to provide additional information about the program and evaluate her distance communication equipment and technology needs. Through iCanConnect, Alisha received an iPhone 8 Plus, an iPad, and a wearable alert device for real-time notification for phone calls and messages.

“Once I received my equipment and training, I could communicate with my family again,” she said. “It changed my life. With my iPhone, I can communicate just like anybody else. I couldn’t do that before. I struggled and became depressed. With my equipment and training through iCanConnect, I felt back to normal again.”

Being able to stay in touch with others in real-time is especially important to Alisha. “I use text messaging with my kids the most,” she said. “But I also use Facebook Messenger and FaceTime a lot to communicate with family back home. And my alert device is great. It vibrates when I have a new message or when the phone is ringing so I never miss an important message from my family. iCanConnect has helped me tremendously. I feel independent and safer. It’s been a blessing.”

The two-time cancer survivor has always been resilient, but not being able to communicate with her family and those around her left her feeling isolated. Now she has a new path and purpose in life. “I can do so many things. I don’t feel lost anymore,” she said. “I’ve started the process to get my GED and began writing a book about my life.” She is also enrolled in a Braille course at the Hadley School for the Blind.

“I hope my story can help convince others that they can reach out and ask for help,” said Alisha. “It can be life-changing. I know what it feels like to be lost,” she continued. “It feels good to have my independence back thanks to iCanConnect.”