

**Hawaiian Musician Sings the Praises of iCanConnect**

Lance Kamaka of Oahu, Hawaii makes beautiful music nearly every night of the week. The 56-year-old sings as well as plays ukulele and piano at a local restaurant. “Music is my passion,” declares the island native. Quite remarkable, since Kamaka is blind with progressive hearing loss.

Doctors diagnosed Kamaka with [Norrie Disease](http://ghr.nlm.nih.gov/condition/norrie-disease), an inherited eye disorder that leads to blindness and – in many cases – hearing loss. Even though Kamaka was born blind, he says he didn’t realize it until he was eight years old, when a school teacher told him. But it was the deterioration in his hearing after high school and his reluctance to wear hearing aids that troubled him most.

“For a while, I was hiding it [the hearing loss] – in a state of denial,” Kamaka admits. But he knew he needed a new way to connect with people.

In 2013, Kamaka found out about [The National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program](http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/national-deaf-blind-equipment-distribution-program), which is promoted as [iCanConnect](http://www.icanconnect.org). The program assesses the needs of consumers with combined hearing and vision loss and provides them with a wide range of communications technology such a tablets, smartphones and braille devices. The equipment and one-on-one training are free to those whose incomes qualify.

Kamaka received a BrailleNote Apex. Paired with the smartphone he already owned, it has opened up a whole new way for him to communicate.

“I can do texting. I can send and receive email,” says Kamaka, admitting he doesn’t know what he’d do without these new tools.

[Island Skill Gathering](http://www.isghawaii.com) administers iCanConnect in Hawaii. Company president, Wally Soares has known Kamaka and his family for 25 years. In fact, Kamaka was the first client for iCanConnect Hawaii. He credits the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program with improving the lives of people with significant hearing and vision loss by enabling communication through modern technology. He calls the program “the difference between having an existence and having quality of life.”

Because of his blindness, Kamaka learned to perform music by hearing and memorizing it. After his hearing started to decline, he had a hard time. But Kamaka refuses to give up. He says now, to learn a new song, he’ll put on a pair of headphones and turn up the bass. He uses his BrailleNote to help look up songs on the internet so he can learn them.

Kamaka calls the program “totally awesome,” and says it makes communicating easier and more enjoyable. “iCanConnect is one of the best things that’s happened to me. I’m totally blessed!”

iCanConnect is available in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.  Learn more at [www.iCanConnect.org](http://www.iCanConnect.org/). Click on “State Partners” to find each state’s contacts. The website is accessible to users with low vision and those who use screen readers, and it features video that is both audio described and captioned.  Information about iCanConnect is also available by calling 1-800-825-4595 Voice or 1-888-320-2656 TTY.

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