

**iCanConnect Provides “Life-Changing” Technology for 9 Year Old New Jersey Boy**

Jonathan Ferguson of Flanders, New Jersey is a technical whiz with an incredible spirit! Sure, he does what any young boy his age might do – play Angry Birds, surf YouTube, keep in touch with relatives – but what he loves to do most is make movies and music. Jonathan has experienced a lot in his 9 young years. He was born with [CHARGE Syndrome](http://www.chargesyndrome.org/), a complex genetic condition which causes, among other things, severe hearing and vision loss.

Last March, Jonathan’s family applied to [The National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program](http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/national-deaf-blind-equipment-distribution-program), which is promoted as [iCanConnect New Jersey](http://www.icanconnect.org/new-jersey). Because the family was eligible, Jonathan received an iPad and one-on-one training on how to use it, all at no cost. Since then, his parents say, Jonathan’s creativity and ability to communicate have flourished.

“If he can experience it, he can learn it and he’ll remember it,” says Jonathan’s mom, Julie.

She and her husband were amazed at how quickly Jonathan took to the new device.

“I’m not sure how he does it. He taught himself. He just plays around with things until he gets it,” marvel Scott and Julie Ferguson. Mom and dad say Jonathan also benefited because the man who trained him on the iPad is also deaf-blind.

They recall a special moment that really showed how Jonathan and the trainer,

24-year-old Jon Gabry, bonded. Young Jonathan actually convinced his trainer to download a video game so the two could play together.

“Life-changing” is how Julie and Scott Ferguson describe the impact this device has had on Jonathan. In school, his teachers are looking for ways to incorporate the iPad into his curriculum. They believe it will help him overcome communications challenges that impact his educational and social development.

Now in its second year, iCanConnect offers a wide range of modern distance communications tools and training to people with combined hearing and vision loss. Familiar equipment such as smartphones and tablets, as well as specialized adaptive software, phone amplifiers and braille displays, are available at no cost to those who meet income guidelines.

The [New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired](http://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/cbvi/home/index.html) collaborates with [The College of New Jersey](http://tcnj.pages.tcnj.edu) to administer iCanConnect New Jersey.

“Access to the internet gives us access to each other,” explains Dr. Jerry G. Petroff, with The College of New Jersey. He says iCanConnect gives people confidence and true a connection to the outside world.

Because of his genetic condition, Jonathan had six operations on his heart before he was five years old. Mom and dad acknowledge the 9-year-old Jonathan is a gift, and they are thrilled to see how a piece of distance communications technology is giving their son a creative outlet and a sense of independence.

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>. Click on “State Partners” to find each state’s contacts. There, you will find out how the program works, what kind of distance equipment is available, how to find out if your income qualifies, and how to apply. 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. In New Jersey, you can call (609) 771-2711.

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