

**New Technology Brings Wisconsin Woman**

**Back into the Lives of her 25+ Grandchildren**

“Hi Grandma!” Those two words mean more to Kathy Konkel than anyone could imagine. Like many older Americans, this 79-year-old grandmother from Rhinelander, Wisconsin found herself unable to see and hear as a result of age-related hearing loss and macular degeneration. The combination was devastating and caused her to lose touch with her family, which includes more than 25 grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

But now, that’s changed.

“I’ve been able to talk to those little ones and be a part of their lives,” she said.

Last Christmas, Konkel received a special gift: the ability to reconnect with family and friends through 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 provides modern, distance communications equipment at no cost to people who have severe hearing and vision loss and meet income requirements.

Konkel received a desktop computer, amplified talking phone and a DaVinci magnifier. Now, she is doing things she hasn’t in years—communicating with her family, reading her Bible and – most importantly – regaining her independence.

“The [iCanConnect] program extended my life from a little bit to a great deal,” says Konkel. “For a while, I was alone.”

The [Public Service Commission of Wisconsin](http://www.psc.wi.gov) collaborates with the [Center for Deaf-Blind Persons](http://www.deaf-blind.org) to administer iCanConnect in Wisconsin. Joan Schneider, the program director, says iCanConnect has leveled the playing field for people with hearing and vision loss. While the program helps consumers communicate, Schneider has also observed “family members wanting to be more involved with the person who is deaf-blind.”

And that’s true for Konkel. She’s using her new equipment to help her grandchildren with their studies and loving every minute of it.

Now in its second year, iCanConnect offers a wide array of options - from iPads, to phone amplifiers to screen-reading software – all designed to help people with significant hearing and vision loss stay connected to family, friends and community. Along with the equipment, iCanConnect provides individualized assessment and training at no charge to qualified consumers who meet income guidelines.

The program is available in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Learn more at [www.iCanConnect.org](file:///M%3A%5CPerkins%5CiCanConnect%5CConsumer%20stories%20-%20Press%20Releases%5CNewsletter%20articles%5C2014%5CMay%5Cwww.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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