September 2019

**iCanConnect Helps Michigan Woman Cultivate New Friendships and Reconnect**

**With Old Friends**

Yolanda Burnett met a few special friends while she was a student at the Detroit Day School for the Deaf in the 1980s. “I met a few cool friends during that time,” says 50-year-old Yolanda. But like many childhood friendships, the classmates drifted apart and eventually lost contact. That changed last year when the friends reconnected on Facebook, something Yolanda credits to iCanConnect, The National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program.

Before iCanConnect, Yolanda had been using an old phone that didn’t have the accessibility features she needed to communicate effectively. “The phone I was using was small and it wasn’t compatible with my hearing aids,” she says. “There wasn’t enough contrast to see, let alone read anything on the screen. I was struggling to communicate and it was isolating at times.”

In 2015, Yolanda applied to the Michigan iCanConnect program. After an assessment of her distance communications equipment and goals, she received an iPhone 6s and an iPad Air. She credits the training she received through iCanConnect with helping her use her new equipment with ease.

“The training through iCanConnect was great and I learned a lot. We hooked-up my iPhone and iPad to a big screen TV with an HDMI cord, which is how I like to communicate with my friends and family,” she says. “My trainer showed me how to adjust the screen on the device I‘m using so I can read it, and she taught me how to use Siri for voice commands. My trainer also helped me set up my email and Facebook accounts,” she said. “I have children and grandchildren and now I’m able to connect with them whenever I want. We FaceTime and text each other all the time as well as email and share photos.”

Yolanda uses Facebook to communicate with fellow iCanConnect participants, like her old classmates from the Detroit Day School for the Deaf, and new friends like Mary Bush, whom she met last year though a Facebook group for individuals who are deaf-blind. “We all live several hours away so we use Facebook Messenger a lot for group and video chatting,” says Yolanda. “I’m happy to say we are connected, happy and enjoying our friendships.”

The friends recently had the pleasure of spending time together in person during an outing for individuals who are deaf-blind at a local baseball game. “We had a great time at the game!” says Yolanda. “We laughed and enjoyed ourselves and took plenty of pictures. I’m thankful for iCanConnect for giving us the tools to find each other and reconnect after all these years.”