

**Alabama Grandmother Reconnects & Regains**

**Confidence With New Communications Technology**

“Gave me my life back!” declares 56 year-old Arlene Browning of Montgomery, Alabama. Browning, who has combined hearing and vision loss, raves 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). Through the program, she received new distance communications technology, allowing her to re-connect with her family and re-assess her future.

“It has helped me regain my confidence.”

Browning began losing her hearing at age ten. She kept up with conversations by reading people’s lips. Now she uses hearing aids. But in 2005, doctors diagnosed Browning with [Histoplasmosis](http://www.cdc.gov/fungal/histoplasmosis/definition.html), a pneumonia-type infection that moved from her sinuses to her eyes. The combined hearing and vision loss forced Browning to make the tough decision to quit her job in 2011.

As the condition worsened, this grandmother of nine had difficulty staying in contact with her family. But now, armed with the iPhone 5 she received through the program last December, she communicates by sending and receiving text messages. A screen reader and a portable magnifier help her live more independently, but, she says, it’s the computer that’s really changed her life. Armed with her new communications tools – and job training she is receiving at E.H. Gentry, a local education and rehabilitation facility, – Browning is hoping to get back in the workforce someday soon.

“iCanConnect sure does help folks like me who really need to be connected.”

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

“Deaf-blind people live in a dark world with dead silence,” says Bethany Miller, program manager for the Alabama Institute for the Deaf & Blind, which administers [iCanConnect Alabama](http://www.icanconnect.org/alabama). She credits the program with changing lives. “Thanks to technology and The National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program, they can break free from that lonely world.”

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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