

**Tucson dad studies for a new career thanks to the tools he received through iCanConnect**

Steven J. Wilson of Tucson, Arizona is busy raising his five-year-old daughter and working towards his degree in rehabilitation counseling. His studies represent a new direction for this 48 year old former river boat pilot, whose life-course was changed as a result of combined hearing and vision loss.

Wilson was born deaf but started to lose his vision six years ago, the result of retinitis pigmentosa, a degenerative eye disease that causes severe vision impairment. His optometrist repeatedly prescribed new glasses, without ever diagnosing the true cause of the problem. Wilson grew both frustrated and depressed as it became increasingly difficult for him to do his job and communicate with other people.

“The fun of working, playing and connecting with others was not so fun anymore. The computer screen was getting way too bright and, while I preferred text messages over phone calls, text was very hard to read,” recalls Wilson. “This all contributed to my depression and retreating further back into my cave.”

But working with the [Community Outreach Program for the Deaf](http://www.copdaz.org/) in Tucson, Wilson learned about the [National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program](http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/national-deaf-blind-equipment-distribution-program), promoted as [iCanConnect](http://www.iCanConnect.org), which provides communications technology and training – at no cost – to qualified individuals.

“I'm very happy to have received the training and the devices for, let’s say, the worst case scenario: I lose sight and sound today,” explains 48-year-old Wilson.  “I've got my bases covered. There's an app for that!”

iCanConnect provided Wilson with a wireless braille keyboard called a BraillePen and an iPad which enable him to text, email and share Facebook posts with friends across the country. He can even carry on a conversation with someone across the room.

“I can hand my iPad to a sighted individual and they can either use the touch pad or the Bluetooth keyboard and type a message,” explains Wilson. “From across the room, I am able to read their message in braille and I can then type back so the sighted person can read my message in regular text on the iPad’s screen.”

Wilson has the assistance of a translator in class, but his tech tools make it easier to take notes. He’s training for a new career after working for decades on the Colorado River, first piloting tour boats and, later, repairing boat engines—jobs he could no longer accomplish because of his hearing and vision loss.

Wilson says the technology not only gave him a chance to continue his education; it also helped him adjust to the realities of living with severe hearing and vision loss.

“Once I learned about this technology, I was all over it. Yes, this has all helped my mental well-being,” says Wilson. “I'm happier than ever before because now I know, even should the worst case scenario happen, I lose total sight and sound, I've got the training and technology to continue on with my life.”

iCanConnect offers a wide array of communications equipment, along with 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 and download an application at <http://www.iCanConnect.org/Arizona>. The website accommodates users with low vision, people who use screen readers and features video that is both audio-described and closed captioned. Information about iCanConnect is also available by calling 1-800-825-4595 | TTY 1-888-320-2656.

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