

**Kansas Senior “Back In Mainstream Of Life” With**

**Communications Technology From iCanConnect**

82-year-old Don Fields of Parsons, Kansas is quite a social butterfly—even though he lives with combined hearing and vision loss. Recently, he expanded his social life online, thanks to an iPad and Merlin desktop magnifier he received 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).

“It’s actually put me back in the mainstream of life,” exclaims Fields.

The program provides a wide range of communications technology and one-on-one training to people who are deaf-blind. Familiar equipment such as smartphones, laptops, and tablet – as well as phone amplifiers and braille displays – are available at no cost to people who meet income guidelines.

Fields started losing his hearing nearly a decade ago, but the condition worsened over the past three years. Then, two years ago, he lost most of his vision as a result of macular degeneration. Once a “voracious reader,” Fields could no longer see the print in his books or Bible and, even with hearing aids, he often felt unable to participate in conversations with friends.

Thanks to his new communications equipment, he’s reading and rediscovering his world.

“When I put the iPad in the Merlin, I can go anywhere!” And that includes Facebook and the internet. “It’s a life-saver!”

Vicki Souter provided the assessment and one-on-one training for Fields. She says despite being one of her older clients, he was open to the new technology. “It didn’t scare him like it does other people. He wanted it so badly.”

And, she says it’s clear the devices have had an amazing impact on his life. “It opened up his life to more friends, more communication, the internet, email, Facebook. It just impacted his life greatly.”

[Assistive Technology for Kansans](http://www.atk.ku.edu/) administers iCanConnect or iKANConnect, as it’s called in Kansas. Program Coordinator, Sheila Simmons says, “It is amazing the way the project has allowed people to achieve personal goals.”

Fields is active in his community, volunteering at the senior center, the local hospital and his church. He’s also become a strong advocate of the iCanConnect program, spreading the word to others who are deaf-blind. “I don’t know where I would have wound up if it hadn’t been for this,” he says.

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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