

**Super Trainer Embarks on Whirlwind Trip to Connect Deaf-Blind Consumers in Montana**

Sharon Giovinazzo is passionate about her job and will go to great lengths to bring modern distance communications technology to the deaf-blind to help them stay connected. Giovinazzo trains consumers who qualify and receive equipment through [The National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program](http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/national-deaf-blind-equipment-distribution-program) (NDBEDP), promoted as [iCanConnect](http://www.icanconnect.org). On Christmas, she traveled to Montana for a whirlwind trip – driving 25 hours, over 750 miles, in just 3 days to assess and qualify 14 people for the program.

“Many have never used the internet,” Giovinazzo exclaims! “But now, as the mountains stretch above the horizon and the plains reach as far as the eye can see, Montanans who have a dual sensory loss will be able to reach the world.”

Mandated by the [Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010,](http://www.fcc.gov/guides/21st-century-communications-and-video-accessibility-act-2010) the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) established iCanConnect to ensure every person with combined hearing and vision loss has access to modern distance communications tools and the one-on-one training necessary to use them. The program offers a wide range of technology, devices such as smartphones and tablets, as well as specialized adaptive software, phone amplifiers and braille displays, at no cost to people who meet income guidelines.

Giovinazzo, who is deaf-blind, is vice president for Programs and Services at RLCB, Inc. She’s conducted assessments and training for [iCanConnect](http://www.icanconnect.org) in five states, including Montana. She calls her experience in Big Sky Country “eye-opening.”

“The landscape itself isolates people automatically because there’s so much land and space between everything.”

Giovinazzo also says Montana’s population of deaf-blind is older – more age-related hearing and vision loss.

While there, Giovinazzo assessed a 90-year-old client who had trouble keeping in touch with family but was skeptical of the internet and new technology. The woman knew about Facebook but had never used it before. Giovinazzo showed her how certain devices could reconnect her with her niece in Sri Lanka again. After that, the woman said she was “hooked.” She’s qualified for and is receiving an iPad and a DaVinci magnifier.

“People are appreciative of this program no matter where you go,” Giovinazzo says.

The Perkins School for the Blind administers [iCanConnect](http://www.icanconnect.org/montana) in Montana. Consultant and independent trainer, Kelli Toohill says Giovinazzo’s assessments really got things going. “She was able to start opening up the lines of communication for Montanans who are deaf and blind.”

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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