

**Helen Keller National Center Rep says**

**Working with People who are Deaf-Blind is her “Dream Job”**

The dictionary definition of “dedication” should include a photo of Marilyn Trader. This dynamic, mother of two is the Southeastern Representative for the [Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youth and Adults (HKNC)](http://www.hknc.org/). She works with the people who are deaf-blind in multiple states and says she’s living the dream – one she’s had since high school.

“I always wanted to be a HKNC rep,” says Trader. “I always admired the work that HKNC has done on behalf of people who are deaf-blind.”

Trader is passionate about educating and providing deaf-blind consumers with the tools they need to break barriers, escape isolation, and for some, to gain employment.

“It is seriously something I’ve wanted to do my whole life. This is a heart and soul job.”

So two years ago when Federal Communications Commission created The National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution [Program (NDBEDP)](http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/national-deaf-blind-equipment-distribution-program) Trader knew she had a brand new opportunity to serve the deaf-blind community in the states she represented.

NDBEDP, which is promoted by the national outreach program called [iCanConnect](http://www.icanconnect.org), provides people who have combined hearing and vision loss access to modern distance communications tools and the training necessary to use them. The program is free for those who meet income requirements and offers a wide range of technology, devices such as iPhones and iPads, as well as specialized adaptive software, phone amplifiers, refreshable braille displays, and more.

HKNC has worked closely with [Perkins](http://www.perkins.org) in Watertown, Massachusetts since the launch of iCanConnect in 2012. That collaboration, Trader says, has helped her in her efforts with agencies administering iCanConnect in North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Kentucky. She makes sure those states have the resources, outreach capabilities and trainers necessary to deliver modern telecommunications communications equipment and expert training to people with combined hearing and vision loss.

“We’re bringing in opportunities, opening up doors to so many adventures and employment opportunities,” says Trader. “Seeing the happiness (this program brings) and reducing the level of isolation has been great.”

Trader is reminded of one consumer in particular, who was isolated in her home, but – with the equipment she received through iCanConnect – discovered social media as a way to get re-connected. “Consumers realize that they are not the only ones going through what they are going through. They are connecting with people across the world through equipment, showing that they are able to do so much more if you give them the right tools.”

Trader and her husband, who works as an interpreter, live in North Carolina with their young twin daughters. While she travels quite a bit, Trader makes sure she finds time for family and to coach girls’ soccer.

And, she is keeping a vow she made at her 2001 graduation from [Gallaudet University](https://www.gallaudet.edu/) in Washington D.C.: “I’m going to do all that I can on behalf of the deaf-blind population and that’s my promise to you.”

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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