

**Communications Equipment Providing “Security”**

**For South Dakota Girl with Hearing & Vision Loss**

*“I can do anything!”*

11-year-old Schelbie DeHaai of Miller, South Dakota is an “A” student who loves to talk and text her friends. What fifth grader doesn’t? It’s not out of the ordinary to see a girl Schelbie’s age with a smartphone in hand. But, in her case, the iPhone 5 isn’t a luxury – it’s a lifeline, providing her with a way to communicate and a sense of security. Schelbie has combined hearing and vision loss.

“As soon as she got that iPhone, she did a lot of things she wasn’t doing before. She feels so much more comfortable just having that security,” says Schelbie’s mother, Sarah.

Blind as a result of glaucoma, Shelbie was born with hearing loss as a result of problems in her ear canals. Surgery has done little to restore her hearing and in May 2013, Schelbie’s family applied to [The National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program](http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/national-deaf-blind-equipment-distribution-program), which promoted as [iCanConnect](http://www.icanconnect.org) in South Dakota. The program provided her with the iPhone plus one-on-one training. Since then, Sarah says, her daughter is more active and independent—using the smartphone’s speaker or a headset to hear callers. Schelbie is able to keep in touch with people more than she ever could before.

“I just didn’t realize that it would make that much of a difference. How much it could help her,” Sarah says, noting that Schelbie will walk to school and attend activities by herself, knowing she can call if there’s trouble or use an app to get her back on track.

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

Ted Carrell is Schelbie’s trainer. He says she took to the technology right away and has gained new piece of mind as a result of her new connectivity.

The [South Dakota Department of Human Services](http://www.dhs.sd.gov) administers iCanConnect South Dakota. Program Director Janet Ball says, “We appreciate the impact this program has had on the lives of the individuals in South Dakota served.”

Schelbie says before the iPhone, she felt “alone.” But now, this young woman, who is a huge fan of NASCAR and football, says her life has changed for the better.

“I can do anything!” she declares.

Case in point: last summer she attended camp for the first time. In past years, such an experience would have been out of the question because Shelbie would get sad if she couldn’t reach out for her mom. But, with the phone – and the confidence in how to use it – she can call home. Shelbie also calls her friends to get help with homework, or just chat the way fifth graders do.

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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