

**Mastering her Smartphone without Vision or Hearing:**

***Louisiana Mom Helps Fellow Deaf-Blind Residents Stay Connected Through 21st Century Technology***

Like many other people, Jackie Broussard of Lafayette, Louisiana uses her iPhone constantly. She checks the weather before getting dressed, checks the news to see what’s going on in the world and checks in throughout the day with co-workers, friends, and, best of all, her son who lives in Florida.

“It’s real exciting communicating with my son,” says Broussard. “When I learned how to send my son a message, it was really thrilling.”

Accessing communication technology is especially thrilling for 57-year-old Broussard because she is both deaf and blind. Friends have used their mobile phones to send texts or emails on her behalf, but she has never before been able to manipulate a mobile device.

“First time using an iPhone, I was a little nervous and a little overwhelmed,” recalls Broussard. “It was a touch screen and, oh gosh, I wasn’t familiar with anything like that at all.”

Broussard accesses the iPhone’s many features with a portable braille reader. The device – called a Brailliant B1 32 – costs thousands of dollars, well beyond Broussard’s budget. Fortunately, she qualified for the [National Deaf Blind Equipment Distribution Program](http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/national-deaf-blind-equipment-distribution-program) (NDBEDP). Also known as [iCanConnect](http://www.icanconnect.org), the program provides a wide range of communications technology – including iPhones, phone amplifiers and computers equipped with screen reading software – at no cost to qualified people with combined vision and hearing loss.

iCanConnect also provides intensive, one-on-one training so people just getting their hands on complicated communications equipment know how to use it properly. Broussard received training through her state’s iCanConnect partner agency, [Affiliated Blind of Louisiana.](http://www.affiliatedblind.org)

“I really enjoyed the learning and training process,” says Broussard. “A lot of my friends didn’t know there’s a way to access the iPhone with a braille system. I was able to show them my iPhone and play around. They were shocked at what is out there. “

Broussard has become such an accomplished advocate for the technology that allows deaf-blind people to more effectively communicate that she was invited to become a trainer for the iCanConnect program. She now helps other people with vision and hearing loss tap into the power of communications technology.

“One client is 79,” says Broussard, “and very motivated to learn.”

The iCanConnect program may also one day help Broussard’s 25-year-old son in Florida. He and his mother share a genetic condition called Usher Syndrome, characterized by deafness and progressive vision loss. Both were born deaf and Jackie Broussard began losing her sight in her 40’s.

“This program will also help my son in his future when his vision starts to decline,” explains Broussard. “He’ll be making preparations to be part of the program.”

Now in its second year, iCanConnect is providing new opportunities for people of all generations currently living with vision and hearing loss.

“I notice it makes a big difference in our lives,” says Broussard. “Deaf-blind people can be so lonely and isolated from the world. They end up staying at home and getting depressed. This technology gets people excited to be in touch with other people and in touch with the world.”

Find out more and download an application for Louisiana’s iCanConnect program at <http://www.icanconnect.org/louisiana> or by calling 1-800-825-4595 (phone), 1-888-320-2656 (TTY).

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