iCanConnect participant profile - Jonathan Ferguson

**iCanConnect Helps New Jersey Teen Stay Connected During COVID**

Jonathan Ferguson misses his grandparents. The 16-year-old Flanders, New Jersey teen hasn’t spent time with his grandparents in-person since very early in the COVID 19 pandemic. Not only has Jonathan stopped seeing his grandparents in person, he’s also not been able to attend school or his therapy appointments in-person.

Thanks to the equipment and training Jonathan received through iCanConnect, also known as the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program, he has been able to stay in touch with those closest to him, including his grandparents, friends, teachers and therapists.

Jonathan first became an iCanConnect participant when he was nine years old. His mom, Julie Ferguson, learned about iCanConnect through the New Jersey Center for Deaf-Blindness. After applying and being accepted into the program, the local iCanConnect representative provided an in-person assessment of Jonathan’s distance communication needs. Jonathan was given the equipment and training that best addressed his hearing and vision loss and met his communication goals at the time.

But as he grew older, Jonathan’s distance communication needs evolved. Last year, he requested a new assessment by iCanConnect and, after evaluation, he received updated equipment including a large screen desktop computer and an iPad Pro.

Before receiving the new equipment, Jonathan was having difficulty seeing people and things on his small iPad screen. He’d have to sit up close to the screen and within a few minutes, his eyes would get tired and he’d need to take a break. As a result of the constant eye strain, Jonathan was experiencing fatigue and headaches almost daily.

Now that he has a computer with a 27-inch screen, he can sit farther away from it. His eyes are less strained and he is experiencing a big reduction in the number and severity of headaches. Before, he could only tolerate mere minutes in front of the screen. Now, he spends several hours a day on his computer -- necessary for remote school -- with significantly fewer issues. He emails and chats with his teachers, and he likes to video chat and play games with his friends from school when they have extra time.

In addition, Jonathan uses his new computer for speech, Teacher of the Deaf (TOD), and occupational and physical therapy sessions while he can’t attend them in person. Using video chat for these remote therapy sessions has allowed him to continue working on important life skills as well as practice his American Sign Language (ASL) with his TOD.

His favorite reason for using the computer with the big screen monitor is to video chat with his grandparents and his Aunt Penny. Jonathan and his grandparents have a standing weekly date to video chat. They love to catch-up and play games during their calls. He has a lot of fun playing music with them too. He has a variety of instruments, and sometimes he and his grandmother play their keyboards together.

“Jonathan really loves chatting with Grandma, Grandpa and Aunt Penny, especially right now,” says Julie. “Seeing them on the big screen makes them feel closer somehow, and gives him a comforting sense of connection. Since it will be several months before we can visit in person again, these video chats really help bolster everyone’s spirits in the meantime.”

“It makes me happy,” says Jonathan. “I miss my family and friends, but I love video chatting with them on my computer. I can see them so much better. We play games, and I don’t get tired as fast now. And my eyes and head don't hurt as much thanks to my new equipment from iCanConnect. Thank you iCanConnect!”