iCanConnect participant profile

Stacey Heath

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**iCanConnect Helps Georgia Man Overcome Extreme Isolation During Covid-19**

Stacey Heath was born deaf and began losing his vision when he was eight years old. The 50-year-old Jonesboro, Georgia, man was used to navigating life on a different level, but two years ago, his vision got progressively worse, leaving Stacey feeling more isolated. He was adapting and learning to deal with his newly profound vision loss when Covid-19 struck the U.S., leaving him essentially cut off from society.

As someone who communicates with Tactile American Sign Language (TASL), Stacey relies on in-person touch to communicate. With the onset of the pandemic, he was thrust into near total isolation. There were times, he said, when he would go outside to wait and see if someone would touch him and lead him to where he wanted to go.

Stacey was referred to iCanConnect, also known as the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program, with the hope of receiving distance communication equipment and training that would allow him to re-engage with his family, friends and society. Once accepted into the program, Stacey needed to have an assessment of his distance communication needs and goals so he could be given the appropriate equipment. This was a challenge because his language accessibility requires touching and being closer to him than the social distancing guidelines set forth by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) of six feet.

Because of the severity of Stacey’s isolation, the local iCanConnect representative with the Georgia Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (GCDHH) made the decision to wear full personal protective equipment (PPE) in order to effectively communicate with him. Stacey’s distance communication needs were properly assessed and he received a laptop and enlarged keyboard, smartphone, tablet, and a visual alert signaler, as well as training on how to use his equipment.

Stacey says he is happy with his new devices and he is connecting with people like his brother and other family members again. He can text, email, video chat, use social media, and play games. Before receiving his equipment, Stacey had no way to connect with others through technology. The only way he could communicate was in-person. He says iCanConnect has been a life-changer for him.