**iCC profile for William Pickens**

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**iCanConnect Helps UNC Charlotte Student Communicate with**

**Professors, Classmates and Family**

William “Billy” Pickens III has always been driven by a desire to connect with the world around him. The 21-year-old college senior was born blind and has progressive hearing loss due to Norrie disease. As a result, Billy has often struggled to communicate and “keep up” with his sighted peers, which is something that is important to him.

When he was younger, Billy was unaware of the vast array of accessible equipment and technology available to individuals who are deaf-blind. He thought accessible equipment was hard-to-find, expensive and difficult to use. His perspective changed after his mother, Debra, attended an event for transition age individuals. The event focused on accessible technology and was geared toward young adults who are transitioning from school-age into adulthood with the goal of becoming more independent. It was at this event where she learned about iCanConnect, The National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program.

Billy applied to iCanConnect when he was 16 through the North Carolina Division of Health & Human Services, Vocational Rehabilitation Services for the Blind. An iCanConnect representative visited Billy in his home and provided an assessment of his equipment and technology needs. Through iCanConnect, Billy received an Apple MacBook Pro, a BrailleNote Apex and a refreshable braille display. In addition, Billy received training on how to use his equipment.

Learning how to navigate new equipment can sometimes have its hiccups, but practice, persistence and training can help individuals get comfortable using their new technology. “When I first received my equipment, I went through five hours of training but at the end of those five hours, I didn’t feel like I understood the full potential of the technology,” says Billy. “iCanConnect trainers worked with me until I felt comfortable using the equipment in all types of situations.”

Billy is now entering his senior year at UNC Charlotte, living on campus with a roommate and studying mass communications and journalism. One of the benefits, he says, of the training he received through iCanConnect is his ability to customize the equipment based on his communication needs in any given situation.

“I like having options for how I communicate with people,” Billy says. “For example, I prefer to use my (BrailleNote) Apex to communicate with my professors and classmates, and I tend to use my iPhone with the refreshable braille display when communicating with my family and friends. I like that I can be efficient and quick with my communications.”

Billy highly recommends iCanConnect and thinks everyone who has significant hearing and vision loss should learn more about the program. “The equipment and training I received through iCanConnect has given me access to the world around me,” he says. “It’s a phenomenal program and anyone who is deaf-blind should know about it.”