CANnect

Access. Learn. Succeed.

The most **comprehensive**,
most **accessible** collection
of online learning opportunities
for people with
visual impairments

www.CANnect.org

Broadening the choices

Billy Mitchell is an ambitious guy on track to finish high school early. His accelerated timetable requires classes besides those in his regular school, so Billy studies online too. Online learning brings educational opportunities anywhere at any time, helpful for every student, but especially for the visually impaired and others who cannot drive. Until now, blind and visually impaired students have had only a limited selection of classes that are academically appropriate and also accessible. CANnect is bringing together truly usable learning tools to benefit students everywhere.

Speaking out for fairness

Rachel Talley is enrolled in a mainstream online history class. Her sighted classmates find assignments easy enough, but Rachel spends frustrating hours trying to complete her homework. For example, many websites in the course syllabus display photo galleries of historic events … without accompanying text to explain the images for the blind. Mainstream Internet classes often are not compatible with assistive software, because site developers didn't consider the need or didn't fully understand how to meet it. CANnect is a voice advocating for more universal design to level the playing field.

Going to work with the right tools

Carl Richardson was job hunting, worried he might never land another managerial post since his vision loss was progressing. Two classes from a CANnect provider about e-mail software paid off immediately to keep in touch with employers. He continued to prepare online for his dream job, learning through accessible, usable classes to make professional presentations and then spreadsheets for budget maintenance and fiscal forecasting. His new knowledge gave him the confidence to contend successfully for his satisfying position as ADA coordinator for the Massachusetts State House.
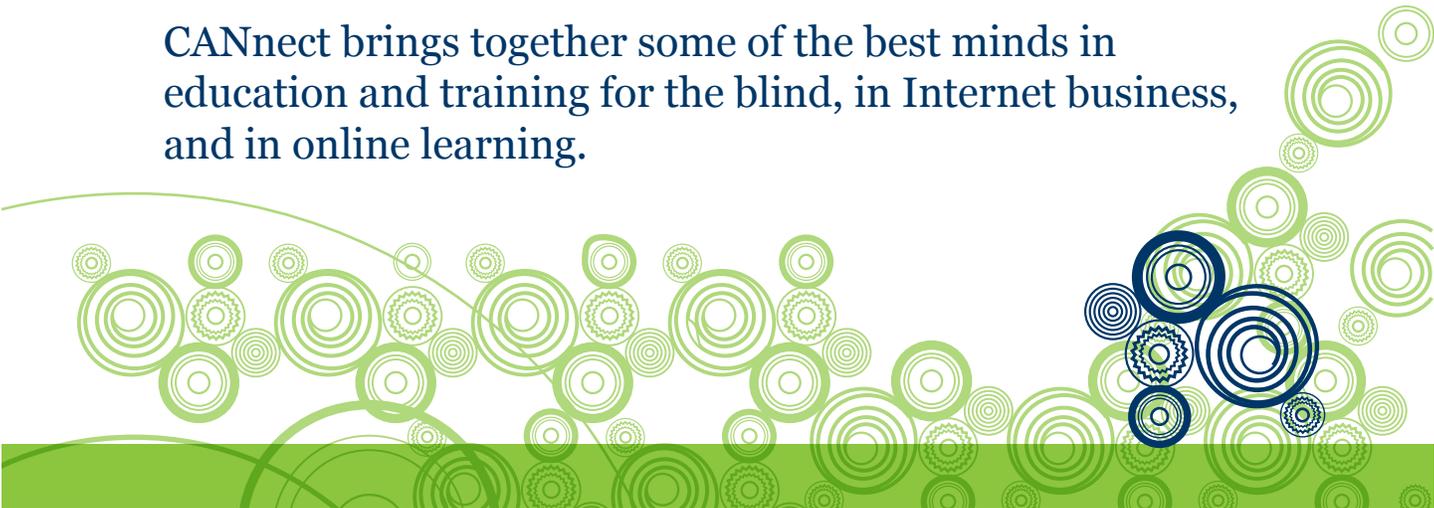
Providing independence through online learning

For a generation, assistive tools for the blind have translated website content into speech; for people with low vision, magnification is often the key to Internet access. However, getting to a website and being able to use it fully are two different things. Most websites are not consciously designed for usability and accessibility, and that makes them needlessly difficult to navigate even with assistive technology.

Lack of usability is doubly frustrating considering the vast power of the Internet to topple barriers to independent living. Online accessibility, done well, can overcome the need for transportation and deliver a sense of community along with tailored education and job training.

CANnect brings together some of the best minds in education and training for the blind, in Internet business, and in online learning. We promote independent living by forging the most comprehensive, most accessible collection of online learning opportunities for people with visual impairments.

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Sizing up the problem and the opportunity

- **Up to 18.5 million U.S. working age adults have severe visual difficulty**, according to a Forrester Research study for Microsoft. That's as many as all the people in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and Houston combined.

- **Seventy percent of the visually impaired adults in the U.S. are unemployed**, says the Lighthouse for the Blind. That rate is 65 points higher than the national average.

- **Across the U.S., there are only 6,700 certified teachers of the visually impaired** serving 100,000 school-aged children. Every state has a teacher shortage, especially in rural areas.

- **Many high schools and over 90 percent of public colleges and universities teach courses online**. A student can earn a degree without ever setting foot on campus, a boon to the visually impaired. Online learning is growing exponentially.

- **It is now three times harder for a blind person than a sighted person to use the Internet**, say experts at the Nielsen Norman Group. Careful website design can eliminate most of this differential.

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We're making progress

CANnect's basic concept has been proven time and again in carefully monitored online classes that developed new skills and opened employment doors for visually impaired students. Now CANnect member institutions are refining and expanding curricula and responding to students' requests for new classes, so we can roll out a full lineup of relevant course offerings. Dedicated partner organizations have signed on with commitments of money, leadership and expertise. We are hard at work to make state-of-the-art, accessible online learning easily available for every visually impaired person who wants it.

"CANnect is creating a world of accessible and usable learning options so that people who are blind and visually impaired can truly have the opportunity for equal access. Online education may well have the same sweeping impact for the blind as Braille."

Dr. Dean Stenehjem
President, CANnect
Superintendent, Washington State School for the Blind

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www.CANnect.org

HELP OUT Make a donation through

The Network for Good www.networkforgood.org

CANnect CONSORTIUM MEMBERS

- **Carroll Center for the Blind** www.carroll.org
- **Maryland School for the Blind** www.mdschblind.org
- **The Gibney Family Foundation** www.tgff.org
- **Washington State School for the Blind** www.wssb.wa.gov

CANnect STRATEGIC COLLABORATORS

EdTech Leaders Online, a project of Education Development Center, Inc.
www.edtechleaders.org

gh, leading assistive technology company
www.gh-accessibility.com

Canadian National Institute for the Blind
www.cnib.ca

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