

“Through audiobooks I have finally discovered that I am worth it. I’m capable of being successful and being a powerful creator in my community. Those of us with disabilities have gifts – gifts when matched with the right tools, like audiobooks, can help us do amazing things.”

—JUSTIN NOVELLO



CHALLENGE

Justin Novello hated reading. In first grade in Columbia, South Carolina, as the other students progressed into higher-level readers, Justin got stuck in the low-level reading books. Due to learning disabilities and ADHD, he thought he would never be able to learn, so he stopped caring about school. “I loved listening to my teachers read stories in class. I thought things would change and reading might get easier when I got older, but I was wrong,” said Justin. “I knew my grades would suffer. It took me years to admit that to myself, and I was a senior in college before I sought help. I almost failed college because I couldn’t read well and hated to lie about my reading.”

SOLUTION

Fortunately, Justin’s academic advisor told him about Bookshare, the world’s largest library of accessible ebooks, and Capti Voice, a reading app that made it possible for him to graduate with a BS in Communication & Media Studies and an MS in Education from Columbia International University. Today he is a media specialist and owner of Soda City Photography. He downloads books to his smartphone and uses text-to-speech for all of his reading. He also downloads papers he writes to Capti and listens to the narration to catch errors. He devours classics like *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* and *Ben Hur*, and keeps up with current events in the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*. He uses the highlighting feature in Capti to keep track of what he reads. His favorite digital voice is Karen from Australia, but he also likes Daniel from Britain.

IMPACT

Justin is a self-professed late bloomer and readily admits that audiobooks in accessible formats have changed his life. “I never knew what I was missing. The childhood stories I could never read and only heard others talk about finally came alive. Because of Capti and Bookshare, I can discuss stories I love and build friendships. I no longer have to be the one outside the circle,” he says. He can’t imagine what his life would be like today without audiobooks from Bookshare. The reason he got his masters’ degree was because of his experience with audiobooks. His thesis is about students with learning disabilities and how to help them in the digital world. “Through audiobooks I have finally discovered that I am worth it,” says Justin. “I’m capable of being successful and being a powerful creator in my community. Those of us with disabilities have gifts – gifts when matched with the right tools, like audiobooks, can help us do amazing things.”

Benetech is a nonprofit that empowers communities through software for social good. Our work transforms how people with disabilities read and learn, makes it safer for human rights defenders to pursue truth and justice, and connects people to the services they need to live and prosper. We’re constantly pursuing the next big social impact.