



“Bookshare is by far the best source because it has the largest collection of books and the ones my students need. From textbooks to research materials to novels, Bookshare is an essential tool for students. I only wish it was available when I was in college.

—JOLENE NEMETH, VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION TECHNOLOGIST



CHALLENGE

Due to cataracts and glaucoma starting at age three, Jolene Nemeth has a significant visual impairment. Her parents enrolled her in mainstream classes and fought for accommodations. Although teachers were willing to help her, many didn't understand her challenges. When she was eight, the teacher wrote some math problems on the chalkboard and told the students to write what they saw. Jolene wrote little squiggles on her paper. The teacher thought she was not paying attention, so she sent her to the principal's office. She also experienced resistance from parents: "We don't want a blind kid in the school." In spite of many obstacles, Jolene pursued her passions and earned a bachelor's degree in communications with a minor in art. In 2001, after graduation, she lost all remaining vision from a failed surgery – the forty-first operation on her eyes.

SOLUTION

At this point, Jolene turned to assistive technology (AT) as a way to achieve her career goals. She became a Bookshare member in 2002 and uses a computer, Victor Reader Stream, and her iPhone to read books. She listens to audiobooks or downloads BRF (braille ready format) files and reads them with her Braille display. Her knowledge of AT and access to ebooks in accessible formats led to her career as a Vocational Rehabilitation Technologist for the Connecticut Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind. She provides services to individuals with visual impairments and physical disabilities. She evaluates clients' needs, recommends assistive technology that will help them with school or work situations, and conducts training.

IMPACT

Jolene has learned to be resourceful, reinvent herself, and keep forging ahead. Her journey to self-sufficiency and meaningful employment is a powerful example. "Many of my clients get frustrated and have difficulty dealing with the barriers of being disabled," she says. "The world can be challenging for those of us who are blind or visually impaired. The important thing is to find ways to do the things you enjoy and try new things. Strive to do your best, learn from your mistakes, and keep looking forward because you never know what you will discover in life's journey."

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