

# iPhone class opens up new world

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NAPLES, Fla. - For eight years, John Urquhart just wanted to call his wife.

But the 85-year-old has been legally blind since 2004 and, because of severe frostbite on his fingers, seeing a phone — let alone pressing the buttons — was a challenge.

But for Urquhart and a dozen others in a class at Lighthouse of Collier, Apple's iPhone has been a game changer. The students, all with different levels of visual impairment, have been learning to use the iPhone to do things ranging from asking Siri for the time to using FaceTime.

And, of course, making phone calls.

“Some people didn't even know how to make a phone call,” said Robin Goldstone Garcia, executive director of the Lighthouse center. “What that means now is that they're able to communicate with the outside world and feel connected again.”

The center for blindness and vision loss has offered Collier County residents free life skills classes since its inception in 2009. And up until recently, technology classes for things such as iPads, iPhones, Mac Books and other laptops were taught in one-on-one sessions.

Peg Clark, 76, started taking lifestyle classes in November. There she met Sharone Fankowski, a fellow classmate, who was already using the iPhone. She could log onto Facebook, use apps and check her emails. The other students were stunned.

“We all looked and our mouths would open up,” Clark said.

Three Lighthouse staff members — technology instructor Niki Dondero, case manager Kaitie Schlehr and Katrina Best, a former intern now teaching in Lee County — saw how the iPhone was helping their students and decided to do a full-fledged class.

And for Urquhart, that meant everything.

Toward the end of the class, he was finally able to call his wife. He dialed the number a few times, determined to reach her, refusing to take no for an answer. When she finally picked up, he joked with her about “doing the ironing and the washing,” he said, letting out a hearty chuckle.

Right away, wife Jackie knew it was him. “I’m mostly just happy for him because that really opens up new things for him, almost a new world,” she said.

Clark also enjoys her newfound independence. Her fading vision got even worse after a car accident in October, and she feared she would lose all her independence and never use a cellphone again.

Clark, who lives in Naples, began taking a six-week, twice a week four-hour independent daily living skills class at the center, where she learned how to safely get around the community on public transit, how to brush her teeth, use a cane and get dressed.

After watching Fankowski play with the miracle device, Clark knew she wanted one, too, and asked for it for Christmas. Around February, Schlehr came over to fix Clark’s computer and left Clark with an activated, fully functional iPhone.

Goldstone Garcia thinks acceptance is the biggest adjustment for the visually impaired. “It’s a grieving process. You think it’s the end of the world. As soon as they walk through the door, we want them to know that there is hope.”

And the 10-week Apple class did just that.

The instructors split the course into two days between two different apps: One taught students how to use Zoom, the other, VoiceOver, a built-in, more advanced screen reader option.

Dondero said the class gave students a rundown of basic iPhone apps, how to download them; check for software updates; make phone calls; use Siri and FaceTime.

Clark used Zoom, a built-in magnifier that works with all apps downloaded from the app store.

Schlehr had two students in her class who had been using iPads for years and four people who had never picked up a device, Clark said. The challenge for Schlehr was figuring out what apps the more advanced users hadn't come across.

"They're usually using it for Facebook and emails," she said. "Most of them hadn't gone into calendar and settings."

The most rewarding part was watching them go from, 'I don't think I can use this; I don't need this' to using Siri and making a phone call. "And asking what time it was. That was a big thing," Schlehr said.

The students completed the class April 9 and Goldstone Garcia couldn't be more proud: "It's nice to see that they're going back up North as more confident and empowered people."

Apple declined to comment on the story, but Clark is trying to get in touch with them so she can thank them herself.

The center is currently planning a more advanced class where students will learn how to use the calendar, reminders and camera (VoiceOver will tell users when a face is on the screen).

Schlehr also wants to look into more accessibility apps, like those that tell the denomination of a bill and more advanced lessons, like copy and paste.

The most important thing for people who want to use technology is to have the knowledge of the products that will let them do that, Goldstone Garcia said, adding that the hardest part for a visually impaired person is the frustration and fear of it all.

"Like oh my ... who is going to take care of me? They don't realize they can take care of themselves."

### **Brown Bag lunch series**

What: Caretaker support group and educational seminar for the visually impaired

When: 11:30 a.m., third Tuesday of the month (May 19) Where: Lighthouse of Collier, 2685 Horseshoe Drive S., Suite 211, Naples

Information: 239-430-3934 or [bit.ly/1JL5d4k](http://www.bit.ly/1JL5d4k) (<http://www.bit.ly/1JL5d4k>)

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