



SUMMER 2022

IMPACT

Building life-changing opportunities for people who are blind.

Lifelong Impacts of S.E.E. Summer Camps:

DeAndre Kellyman of IFB Solutions Shares His Story



For the last 20 years, DeAndre Kellyman has found his life intertwined with IFB Solutions in more ways than one. Born visually impaired with cone-rod dystrophy and nystagmus, the 27-year-old first came to IFB Solutions as a student enrolled in the Student Enrichment Experience (S.E.E.) Summer Camp.

“I was about 7 or 8 years old, and I had always been around people that can see,” Kellyman said. “I was the only visually impaired person in my school, and I was faced with all these challenges. When I found out there were other kids like me — that I wasn’t the only one — it really gave me a lot more confidence. I learned to never let those challenges bring me down.”

When asked if he remained friends with any of his fellow campers, Kellyman rattled off a list of five, six, seven names without hesitation — pausing to recall specific camp memories with a few. “Just getting to interact with all these kids each year was an amazing thing,” he said. “In the classroom, we learned how to paint and sculpt with clay, and we learned to use tools and technology for day-to-day tasks. And the field trips were incredible too. One year, we went to the baseball stadium, and they let me and Shareef sing ‘Take Me Out to the Ballgame’ in the skybox.”

In addition to providing a sense of community and teaching campers valuable life skills, S.E.E. Summer Camps taught Kellyman that nobody is perfect — everyone is dealing with something, whether it’s well-hidden or immediately apparent. What matters most, he explained, is how a person deals with his or her situation.

“There’s so much value in this camp,” he said. “Kids go in scared and not knowing anyone and come out a totally different person. It really helps mold children to face the world — and to face the world as a human being with a disability. It gives kids the courage to say, ‘Hey, I have a disability, and I’m proud of it.’”

Two decades later, IFB still plays a huge role in Kellyman’s life. Now an employee at IFB Solutions, he works on the team that each day manufactures hundreds of mattresses for North Carolina State Schools, Navy aircraft carriers, and the company’s commercial customers. He spends much of his free time honing his musical talents, including playing lead guitar in IFB’s The Big Shot Band. He even met his girlfriend, another employee, while performing with the employee choir. For Kellyman, it’s more than just a job.

“IFB is like a second home to me,” he explained. “It’s like a big family — and so many of these guys knew me when I was in S.E.E. Camp, so seeing them still thriving now just really brings joy to my heart.”

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Scan QR code to explore S.E.E. Programs.

“My hope for all my students is that they will reach their full potential.”

**KIM FLANAGAN, Teacher,
Tracy’s Little Red Schoolhouse**

As the first visually impaired student to graduate from the Guilford County Schools in North Carolina, I can often relate to many of the challenges my own students face in the classroom and beyond. Diagnosed with retinoblastoma, a cancer of the eyes, at 2 years old, I spent most of my life with 20/200 vision in just one eye, but later lost my remaining vision as an adult.

When I was in school, there were no machines to enlarge my lessons for me. So my parents did a lot of that work by hand, retyping lessons on a manual large print typewriter, tracing diagrams and worksheets with black marker, even reading and recording textbooks onto cassettes.

As a teenager, I knew that I wanted to teach and help future generations of children succeed, just like my parents helped me. So I went on to college, earned a degree in special education, and spent 14 years teaching in the Davidson County Schools just outside of Winston-Salem. Now, as the Youth Program Coordinator at IFB Solutions’ S.E.E. programs, I can provide the opportunities kids living with blindness need to become as independent as possible in a sighted world.

Here at Tracy’s Little Red Schoolhouse, experience and enrichment are key. We want our students baking cookies, sculpting pottery, planting popcorn, and playing music. We’ve gone to trampoline parks,



“One of the most rewarding parts of my work is watching kids try new things, build self-esteem, and grow in the S.E.E. programs.”

ziplining adventures, and live theatre performances. We want these children and youth to participate in life as do their sighted peers.

Aside from just having fun, it’s all to show them that there are so many things they can go out and do. And if they find an activity that’s particularly challenging, we show them how they can adapt it into something that works for them.

One of the most rewarding parts of my work is watching kids try new things, build self-esteem, and grow in the S.E.E. programs. Some students have left because they’ve developed the skills and confidence they

need to fully participate in the sighted world. That always feels amazing because then we know we’ve done our job.

For the 10th anniversary of Tracy’s Little Red Schoolhouse, I remember each of the victories I’ve celebrated with my students over the years, but I also look to the future of the program and all it can still accomplish for the community.

My hope for all my students is that they will reach their full potential. I don’t ever want anyone to feel like they’re held back from reaching their highest goals. There’s too much life out there to live.



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FUNDRAISER

**SEPTEMBER 8, 2022
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GOLF TOURNAMENT

**SEPTEMBER 21-22, 2022
ASHEVILLE, NC**



The Gandhi Family experiences life-changing impacts from S.E.E. Programs.

THE GANDHI FAMILY'S DEEP GRATITUDE TO S.E.E.

For Sanjay and Lauren Gandhi, donating to IFB Solutions' Student Enrichment Experience Program is deeply personal.

The couple's children, Asha and Drew, were born at just 24 weeks, both blind due to retinopathy of prematurity, though Asha has some near-range vision in one eye. When their children were in preschool, the Gandhis began seeking out summer activities and enrichment programs for their kids, but found that many were simply not accessible to children with low or no vision.

That's when they were introduced to IFB Solutions — coincidentally, just in time for S.E.E. Summer Camp's inaugural year.

"We were always trying to make adaptations to things so that they could participate and experience things too," Lauren explained. "This time, we were so happy to finally have something that fit *them*. This was something that was made for their skill sets, and it was wonderful. It just really helped them begin to understand more about the world around them and explore it in a safe place, at a pace that was accessible to them."

As their children grew and began attending the S.E.E. After School Program, the Gandhis often found themselves turning to IFB for information, guidance and support in other

ways. In particular, they expressed their deep gratitude to the staff of Tracy's Little Red Schoolhouse for welcoming questions and candid discussions that helped them, as sighted parents, become better advocates for their children.

"One of the things that I think is really just priceless is the fact that [the children] have role models who are also visually impaired," Lauren said. For example, "Drew never liked to read, and getting him to read was a true struggle. But he loves Ms. Kim [Flanagan] — and he would read with her every day as a preferred activity. So much of his life felt hard, but she made that time for him and encouraged him, and he felt such support. It becomes a kind of mentor relationship" that lasts into adulthood.

Asha, now 21 and in college, still occasionally reaches out to her former teachers at Tracy's Little Red Schoolhouse for advice navigating young adulthood with a visual impairment, from school and employment to daily life challenges.

And, Sanjay added, "one of the most important things they teach kids is to be their own self-advocates — to not be afraid of sticking up for themselves and to stand up for their rights. There's just so much value there, and it gives these kids a chance to reach their potential."



Groundbreaking for Tracy's Little Red School House in November 2011.



Your support of our mission is woven into every smile, every proud moment, every accomplishment by these students - **THANK YOU!**

Happy 10th Anniversary, Tracy's Little Red Schoolhouse!



Luke and Janie Fechtel,
S.E.E. Charlotte participants



"I have LCA*. I am a print and Braille reader. I have trouble seeing small things, but I can see color, shapes, and light. I have been to S.E.E. camp twice, and it's awesome! I love swimming, and my friends will all be there!"

– Janie Fechtel

"I have LCA*. I am a Braille reader. I cannot see small things like bugs and stuff. I can see colors, but I get some of them mixed up. I use a cane to get around. My favorite thing about S.E.E. is EVERYTHING! I've only been to S.E.E. camp once, and I'm really looking forward to banana boating and swimming."

– Luke Fechtel

