



SUMMER 2023

# IMPACT

Building life-changing opportunities for people who are blind.

## SET FOR SUCCESS Student Enrichment Experience (S.E.E.) Programs



**Many know that IFB Solutions is the nation's largest employer of people who are blind or visually impaired. In fact, increasing employment opportunities for this population is the main focus of the nonprofit's mission. But in order to increase those numbers, it's important to first set the next generation up for success. And that's where Student Enrichment Experience (S.E.E.) Programs come in.**

For blind or visually impaired children in North Carolina (and beyond), IFB's S.E.E. Programs can be life-changing. These kids learn essential life skills in S.E.E. After School, make lasting memories, and build friendships at S.E.E. Summer Camps or find exciting new ways to stay active with sports and outdoor recreation activities at S.E.E. Field Days.

These enrichment programs "let them know they're not alone," said Chris Flynt, director of programs and Community Low Vision

Centers. "They develop relationships that, in some cases, last forever, and they learn so much from each other — from other kids who are experiencing the same things they are or who have already been through it. They learn to advocate for themselves, to use assistive technology and to access resources available to them."

"We may work with a small population, but we make a large impact," Flynt continued. "These kids have needs that aren't being met any other way, and we step in and bridge the gaps."

Camp H2O, IFB's weeklong residential camp, "is especially important for kids," said Allia Romero, S.E.E. Program coordinator. "Our staff and counselors are all either trained to work with visually impaired children or visually impaired or blind themselves, and, because of that, we tend to not be overly helpful in ways that can come across to kids as overly protective."

For the group of rising seventh to tenth graders at H2O, this is huge.

"I've heard kids say, you know: 'The fact that you let me walk down those steps without grabbing my arm or asking me if I needed help was so important to me,'" Romero continued. "They really notice things like that" — and at an age where most kids are just beginning to define and explore their own identities, giving them room to stretch their wings and be more independent is vital for their self-confidence going forward.

"They get to feel like any other kid having a traditional camp experience," Romero said. "They get to spend the night in dorms, stay up till 10 o'clock chit-chatting with their friends. They get to experience all these things without feeling like they're 'different' in some way."

And as the school year starts, a child who is blind can share his or her own tales about zip-lining, rock climbing or kayaking at camp — just as a sighted child might. Learning to paddle a canoe, ride a horse or play hockey may not seem like the most crucial of life skills to some, but for children who feel a bit "different," it's these small experiences that go a long way in helping them feel more at ease.

Every opportunity and learning experience IFB offers children is free to families and funded by community support, as well as IFB, with each individual donation truly making a difference to a child's future.

The S.E.E. After School programs in both Winston-Salem and Charlotte provide K-12 education that reaches beyond lessons learned in school, combining arts and crafts, music, cooking, assistive technology and independent living skills to foster independence. This year, on May 20, S.E.E. Field Day kicks off the summer in Charlotte, providing opportunities for children to learn about a variety of sports while spending time with peers in a safe and accessible atmosphere. This year's lineup includes beep kickball, yoga, tandem cycling, guide running and an obstacle course.

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# UPWARDLY MOBILE

## ANASTASIA POWELL

Anastasia Powell was 13 when she began to lose her eyesight. Struggling to see the chalkboard at the front of her classroom, Powell mentioned the issue to her mother, and both assumed a trip to the eye doctor would provide a quick fix. But a vision test found much more going on behind her eyes than she and her family realized, and her sight would only continue to deteriorate.

As a young teenager, “I didn’t want to be different,” she said. “I didn’t want to carry a cane. I didn’t want people to look at me and think, ‘What’s wrong with her?’ I was angry, and then that anger turned into fear. ... My mom let me ride that emotional roller coaster for a while — she knew I needed to let it out — but then she told me we would embrace what life has given me. She said, ‘Let’s figure it out together.’”

Powell decided to learn all she could while she still had vision: She mastered using a cane and honing her orientation mobility skills. She spent countless hours after school buried in books learning Braille, and she found new ways to accomplish just about everything, all while keeping up her grades as an A/B student.

“I had some nights where I was frustrated, and thought: ‘Why me?’” Powell said. “But then I’d think, ‘Well, why *not* me?’ I can figure this out. There are millions of people who are blind that do exactly that every single day.”

By her 20s, Powell lost her vision completely, and, by then a single mother of three, she made ends meet through disability benefits and public assistance. “It was enough to get by,” she explained. “But as my little girls were getting older, they wanted to participate in everything under the sun — cheerleading, swimming, marching band, Girl Scouts. Suddenly, the disability check wasn’t going to cut it.”

But, she continued, “I had no work history. I didn’t know where to go. One of my friends in the blind community told me to try applying at IFB, so I did — and I was hired in the T-shirt department, joining shoulders.”



**“Coming into IFB with no type of skills, no work history, they really laid the foundation for me to succeed. IFB shaped my career and put me on the path to where I am today.”**

That was 18 years ago, in 2005. Today, Powell works in an office of her own, as IFB’s communications manager. As someone with no prior work experience, she credits much of her success to IFB, its close-knit community and the programs that IFB offers its employees.

“One day I was at my sewing machine, listening to some announcements, and they were talking about all the extracurricular things they had going on,” she said. Some were support groups, some were art classes, some were skill-building workshops — “and I thought, ‘Well, I’m here. Let’s see how else I can get involved.’ And that’s what really started my upward mobility journey.”

Powell signed up for one of the programs, a Toastmasters class, which gives participants the opportunity to work on and improve communication, public speaking and leadership skills. It was a huge success — building her confidence, shaping her public

speaking skills and helping her deal with nerves in front of a crowd. After Toastmasters, she continued seeking out opportunities to learn through IFB, taking computer classes, typing classes, and a business essentials course.

“Coming into IFB with no type of skills, no work history, they really laid the foundation for me to succeed,” said Powell, who was named IFB’s Employee of the Year in 2010 and its Career Achiever of the Year in 2014. “IFB shaped my career and put me on the path to where I am today.”

In 2014, Powell was promoted to the programs department, and from there, she moved to communications in 2020. Though her daughters are now grown, she remains grateful to IFB for giving her girls the fun-filled childhood she always hoped they would have.

“I know it sounds cheesy, but it’s true: IFB has really made a difference in my life,” Powell said. “It provided me with not only the means to live, but with a full life for me and my kids. That first job opened a door for me to buy a home. It opened a door to send my kids to college, and it opened the door for my kids to be able to do things other kids did. I’m so appreciative of all that IFB provides those of us who are blind or visually impaired. Without these opportunities, many of us would still be at home, living on disability and struggling to make ends meet.”



Heather Robinson with husband Eric, daughter Hannah, and rescue dog, Devin.

## UNWAVERING SUPPORT

### Heather Robinson

When Heather Robinson moved from North Carolina to Phoenix, Arizona, she was sad to give up her position on IFB Solutions' board.

"I ended up getting involved with IFB while I was in Winston-Salem, working for Caterpillar," she explained. "We took a tour and saw all the great things they do. You could just tell it was a very sincere effort to help people, and I'm a big believer in helping people who want to be employed. I wanted to do my part in whatever way I could to help their meaningful and impactful work."

Robinson originally joined the board in 2014, but left due to her cross-country move in 2016 — though she continued to be a donor and avid supporter of IFB's mission. However, the one good thing that came out of the pandemic, she said, was the opportunity to be virtually involved with the causes you care most about, even from thousands of miles away.

So, in 2021, Robinson rejoined IFB's board, as well as several of its committees. Currently, she serves as the board's vice chair and heads the Development and Awareness committee.

"IFB's mission doesn't waver," Robinson said. "It's always right in front of you: It's about supporting that team of people. It's a constant reminder of what we're there for, and it's what keeps me inspired and involved."

In addition to serving on the nonprofit's board, Robinson sponsors a child every year for the S.E.E. Summer Camp, which is free for campers and their families thanks to generous donors like Robinson.

"I saw photos of the different activities from the camp, and one of them showed campers on horseback. My daughter was an avid horseback rider for years, and I just wanted to give somebody else that experience," Robinson explained. "Giving kids the opportunity to do things that they wouldn't normally get to do — to give them that independence — that's really valuable."

IFB touches the lives of so many people, she continued, but in her eyes, it all starts with building confidence in children and teens, teaching them to dream big so that, one day, they can make a difference.

"It's the best kind of charity in that, honestly, I don't even think of it as a charity: It's helping people who want to work have a job," Robinson said. "Everybody, no matter who you are, has limited time and resources, so you want to be sure you're giving time and money to the causes that really matter, that you really believe in. Well, I don't have any doubt in my mind that when I donate my time and money to IFB, it's going to all the right places."

## SET FOR SUCCESS

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When summer break begins, the Winston-Salem S.E.E. Day Camp picks up where After School left off to offer additional opportunities for education, enrichment and recreation. The Charlotte S.E.E. Day Camp expands this idea to include city-wide activities, allowing children to explore and navigate North Carolina's largest metropolis while learning to use its network of assistive technology — from the Charlotte Light Rail to audio descriptions at the local movie theater. In June, S.E.E. Camp H2O gets kids out on the water for a traditional overnight camp experience with a wealth of activities, from climbing and kayaking to archery and ropes courses.

In Charlotte, IFB also hosts special S.E.E. on Saturday events for kids — with each one centered on a different (often athletic) activity made accessible to children who are blind or visually impaired. Past events have included blind soccer lessons, sneaker fittings and running clinics, touch-based art exhibits, water days at Lake Norman, and a beeping Easter egg hunt for children 10 and under.

"There's sometimes this stigma of 'Oh, this person is blind or they use a cane, so they can't do X, Y and Z,'" said Romero, echoing the false perceptions others may have. "These programs get kids out into the community, and people see them doing all kinds of things that they may not realize kids that are blind can do. Times are changing, the world is becoming more accessible, and we're just trying to help the ball continue rolling forward, getting kids out there doing the same things everyone else is doing — and letting others see them doing it."



Thank you to our  
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Learn more here:  
[ifbsolutions.org/programs-services/see-summer-camps/](https://ifbsolutions.org/programs-services/see-summer-camps/)



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IFB Solutions creates opportunities to learn and grow, no matter the environment.



**Support our Fundraising Events.** IFB Solutions is proud to host a variety of events that raise awareness about our mission of employment, training, and services for people who are blind. Funds from these events support the cost of free programs and services available through IFB Solutions.

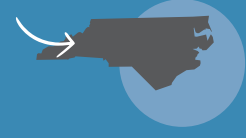
# BINGO for BAGS

FUNDRAISER



Join us for this exciting evening of bingo, where winners can walk away with one of dozens of designer handbags and accessories (including a Louis Vuitton!). From heavy hors d'oeuvres and specialty cocktails to a vibrant silent auction, Bingo for Bags is the event you don't want to miss!

**Date:** Thursday, September 14, 2023  
**Location:** Chenal Country Club  
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**Date:** Thursday, June 22, 2023  
**Location:** The Omni Grove Park Inn  
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For additional information, contact IFB Solutions at [philanthropy@ifbsolutions.org](mailto:philanthropy@ifbsolutions.org).