

“Nothing Is Impossible”



Charity won the national singing competition organized by IFB Solutions in 2016

As far back as she can remember, Charity Hampton of Rural Hall, NC, has had problems with her vision, depth perception, and glare. “I was born with albinism. But I’m lucky in that I’ve always been surrounded by supportive people,” she said.

Charity is the only one in a family of five siblings with a genetic visual impairment. All were home-schooled. Her mom would read to her or increase the text font on the computer so Charity could read on her own.

Gifted with a beautiful voice, and a 4-octave range, Charity has been singing since she was 2 and

began performing for her church at age 3. Her choir director would enlarge music charts so she could participate with the other singers.

When she was in her “tweens,” Charity learned that her vision problems had been misdiagnosed. She was, in fact, legally blind. “It was actually a relief,” she said. “It meant that I would have access to programs and services that were previously unavailable to me.”

One such program was IFB Solutions’ Student Enrichment Experience (S.E.E.) Camp, where Charity learned different techniques to do everyday tasks that allowed her to be independent. S.E.E. Camp also put her in touch with a valuable community of peers and mentors who fully understand the challenges of living with impaired vision.

“After going to S.E.E. Camp for a couple of years, I started volunteering there during the summers,” Charity said. “It was an awesome experience! Since I was involved in community theater, helping the students put on a performance of *The Little Mermaid* was exciting. It was great to see them reveal a sense of pride in their accomplishments.”

Today, at 25, Charity works part-time as a teacher in the S.E.E. After School Program at Tracy’s Little Red Schoolhouse in Winston-Salem. She is a wonderful role model for the students. She will not let her vision impairment get in the way of living her dreams. She’s won national singing competitions and hopes one day to tour with a Broadway show. She said, “My favorite quote is by Audrey Hepburn: ‘Nothing is impossible.’ The word itself says ‘I’m possible.’”



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Teaching in the Time of COVID

Jay Hardwig, Program Manager and Director of Residential Camps

Dear Friends,

I've been impressed with the way teachers across the country have responded to the challenges of bringing education online during this pandemic. Teaching students who are blind or visually impaired online presents its own unique set of challenges. It can also bring unexpected rewards.

Here at IFB Solutions, we explored how to transform our Student Enrichment Experience (S.E.E.) Camps into virtual using the Zoom platform. Instead of our traditional water sports, camping, hiking, and field trips, we found other ways to help students sharpen their life skills last summer and during the school year.

At first, we weren't sure that it would work. We thought that kids might be getting "Zoomed out" with all the online learning they were enduring. And, of course, there's no way that sitting in front of a computer screen can ever beat the thrill of actually zooming through the air on a zip line or floating on a raft.



Jay (top middle) teaches S.E.E. students to put together a catapult with supplies students previously received by mail.

We started small with a one-week trial, and it grew from there to include our after-school skills-building programs in accessible technology, literacy, and self-help. We even reached out to students

who had never attended S.E.E. Camp before. The students really took to it! They showed up every day, on time, and were excited to be there. Even if that meant meeting virtually, they wanted to be with their friends – S.E.E. is their safe place where they could talk to their classmates or camp buddies who are just like them.

In our quest to learn how to keep our kids engaged online, we borrowed ideas from other teachers. It's a little trickier to teach online when students have different levels of visual function and technical know-how, but we found novel ways to make activities accessible and meaningful.

Our "camp in a box" approach was very impactful: we delivered materials to students' homes so they could join in group art and science projects, story time, and Braille literacy activities. We also offered yoga and resistance band exercise sessions to get them up and moving.

Rather than demonstrating visually how to do a science experiment, for example, we had to verbally describe it. We also had to guide students to position their web cameras so we could see that they were following along.

It was very rewarding to see the progress in our students' use of accessible technology. For our students, it is an important skill they've developed: to be able to join meetings and participate in online classes even without seeing a computer screen. These students will use this skill for the rest of their lives.

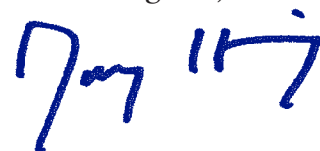


Jay Hardwig teaches independent living, orientation and mobility, and Braille skills in Western North Carolina.

We plan to offer our traditional S.E.E. Camps this summer, unless COVID has other plans. We will follow all CDC and State guidelines for summer camps to make sure that whatever we do, we are doing it safely.

In closing, I'd like to thank you for helping us provide online programming almost without interruption since July. Many of our students are the only ones in their classroom or school who are dealing with the challenges of living in a world built for people with sight. Our programs offer a safe space for them to explore and expand their capabilities and build lasting friendships with understanding peers. Your generosity makes it possible for us to offer these activities at no cost to their families. We appreciate it!

Warm regards,



Jay Hardwig
Program Manager
Director of Residential Camps

Why I Give: John Rowland

“IFB Solutions is an outstanding organization,” said retired CPA John Rowland of Little Rock, AR. He and his wife Denise have been contributing to the mission through donations of their time, talents, and treasure for many years. “I am extremely proud of both the employees and the management for the way they’ve been able to keep operations going safely during this time of COVID.”

John first learned about the program when he was hired to audit finances for then Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind. “I was impressed with the Lighthouse organization and the people I was working with,” he said. “When I retired in 2012, I was very honored to be asked to join their Board of Directors.”

During his tenure, the Board considered merging the Lighthouse with IFB Solutions. “Originally, I was skeptical about the merger,” John admitted. “I wanted to ensure that we would be able to provide the same level of care to the people we were serving here in Arkansas. But my concerns dissolved right off the bat!”

“All you have to do is tour any of the three facilities in Asheville, Winston-Salem, or Little Rock and see for yourself,” John said. “It’s amazing to see how purposeful and dedicated the employees are and how much they seem to enjoy the work they are doing.”

“In all honesty, if I were to lose my vision, I’d probably be wondering what I was going to do with the



John and Denise have been eager supporters of S.E.E. Camps and have helped Arkansas students who are blind attend these camps in North Carolina.

rest of my life,” John said. “But to see these folks at work or hear about how a job has changed their lives... I get choked up. It has a way of reaching right into your heart!” John goes on to share that IFB has given its employees the opportunity to re-define their purpose in life, and they really appreciate it. “These are some of the happiest people you’ll ever be around. They’re a community. They help each other and enjoy being around one another,” he concludes.

John currently chairs the Advisory Council in Little Rock. The group’s current project involves raising funds to build a walking track for IFB employees. “It will be nice for them to have a safe place to get some fresh air and exercise during

their workday. It’s a very popular project. The employees and their families contribute to it too, and we have raised about 50% towards the goal so far.”

Denise has also volunteered with the Bingo for Bags fundraisers. “Getting together with friends to play Bingo for a chance to win a designer bag is a fun way to raise funds for IFB programs,” John said. The event was growing every year but had to be put on hold due to COVID. “We hope we can get it back soon.”

John encourages everyone to take a tour and help raise awareness about IFB Solutions. “It is a comfort for people who are losing their vision to know that a supportive community is nearby.”

For most recent information about our fundraising events in 2021, visit our website: ifbsolutions.org/events

S.E.E. Summer Camps



Our S.E.E. students at ALL locations are gearing up for the second virtual Steps to S.E.E. Walkathon May 1 – May 31! Last summer, we raised over \$40,000 for youth who are blind or visually impaired. This time, we will work to match that to create an opportunity to send students who are blind to S.E.E. summer camps!

Want to keep the momentum going? Sign up as a monthly donor here to help send children to a S.E.E. summer camp: ifbsolutions.org/stepstosee

- \$10/month – sends two S.E.E. kids whitewater rafting.
- \$20/month – funds our annual S.E.E. Youth Bowling Tournament.
- \$40/month – funds our Field Day, providing a day of adaptive sports for kids who are blind.
- \$100/month – sends one S.E.E. kid to a residential S.E.E. camp.

START GIVING THE GIFT OF INDEPENDENCE ALL YEAR LONG TODAY!



Nantahala River rafting is one of the most thrilling activities at S.E.E. Adventure Camp each year.



Asheville S.E.E. Day camper Hayes shopping in preparation for a cooking activity. Campers build their shopping lists for their recipes and acquire all their produce independently.



Marvin on a zipline at S.E.E. Adventure Camp. This camp focuses on independent teen students who stay at Nantahala Outdoor Center for three nights – for many, it's their first time away from home.



Students in Asheville S.E.E. Day Camp practice orientation and mobility navigating the city. Supervised activities like this one are a major component of S.E.E. Camps that focus on developing independence in its participants.



S.E.E. Camps create opportunities for unique experiences campers might have not ever had, such as horseback riding.



Hudson and Tempy, Asheville SEE Day Campers in 2019, are mastering Braille skills as they prepare their shopping list for the independent shopping activity.