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## Youth with Disabilities Take The Spotlight In Local Author's New Book



### Idaho author, Mike Kelly

by Tia / Comments Off on

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By Bethany Maile

Photo Kimberlee Miller

Idaho author, Mike Kelly, strives to give a voice to youth with disabilities in his book *Special Stories: Short Stories on Youth with Disabilities And My Adventures Working in the Disabilities Field*.

The book aims to empower differently-abled youth, encourage parents, and strengthen communities.

After a ten-year career in public relations, Kelly was compelled to give back. "It wasn't an easy decision to walk away from a career that pays well. But if my wallet was full, my heart had become empty. Ultimately, I knew I had to make a change," Kelly said.

That change meant working

hard for youth with disabilities in a variety of settings. Kelly worked for nonprofit companies around the country and became a transition educator. In this role, he works with a population of differently-abled students between 14 and 21 years old. He's created educational and recreational programs that help his students find work, succeed in their jobs, learn to manage money, and

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connect to community resources that aid them in their ongoing transition to adult life. "Compared to my former career, the pay is low, but the rewards are monumental," Kelly said.

Those rewarding moments are what inspired him to write the book. "The stories came to me organically," Kelly said. "If something beautiful or powerful made me laugh or tear up or think differently, it became part of the book."

Kelly was inspired by the youth he worked with, but was dissatisfied with the literature representing youths with disabilities. "While there are some books written by parents or teachers on how to raise or teach a child with autism, there are no books featuring numerous kids and a range of disabilities," Kelly said. "That seemed like such a shame. So, I wrote one myself."

*Special Stories* focuses first and foremost on Kelly's students. The book relays his students' experiences to show how much their abilities outweigh their disabilities. He hopes this will encourage readers with disabilities to dream big and realize their potential. He also hopes to help people without disabilities understand the myriad strengths and possibilities that lie within people of varied aptitude.

The book is intended for individuals with disabilities, their families, educators, and workers in the disabilities field. It's ideal, too, for corporate diversity and inclusion professionals. But Kelly is clear that *Special Stories* has an even farther-reaching scope. "The book doesn't just tell the untold stories of so many kids with all different types of disabilities. It also hits on the educational establishment, the generosity and

greed of people, and society's perception of kids with disabilities."

As much as *Special Stories* intends to challenge misconceptions surrounding youth with disabilities, it also aims to encourage and inspire those same kids. Parents of differently-abled youth have contacted Kelly to thank him for highlighting their children's experiences. One father of a teen with Tourette syndrome thanked Kelly for including a story on that specific disability in the book. Kelly said, "His son appreciated how that story showed a complete person with interests and passions and a full life, not a kid dwelling on his disability. When I hear that I'm impacting someone's life in a positive way, I tell my wife, "I just got 'paid'!" That joy Kelly finds in his work is evident in the book, and it is sure to inspire all who encounter it.