



Charleston *Life*

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Part-time Charleston Resident Publishes ‘SPECIAL STORIES’ Book On His Work With Children With Disabilities

Over the last fifteen years, award-winning transition educator Mike Kelly has worked with hundreds of youth with a wide range of disabilities living throughout New Jersey and Pennsylvania. And thanks to the flexibility of Kelly’s work and his wife’s job, the Pennsylvania resident has added Charleston, South Carolina to that list.

Through his company that serves youth with disabilities, Kelly's been able to build a small caseload of students in the coastal city for a period of time each year, allowing him to conduct his work. The last three Januarys, Kelly and his wife—whose company has an office downtown—escaped the snow and cold and both lived and worked in Charleston, enjoying all that the city has to offer.

His recently-published book *Disabilities Field* (2017, Vendue Books) is a heartfelt account of what he describes as his “life’s work.” These thought-provoking and heartwarming stories showcase the many abilities kids with disabilities have—regardless of their challenges—while entertaining, educating, and dispelling societal stereotypes. Aside from stories on many of the students Kelly’s worked with over the years, the book also features accounts on famous professional athletes headlining fundraisers, ordinary folk generosity, celebrity greed, and social musings—all part of Kelly’s experiences in his field. And yes, *SPECIAL STORIES...* features stories about Kelly’s work in Charleston.

“Kelly serves up a generous portion of inspiration here.”
—PHILADELPHIA WEEKLY

SPECIAL STORIES

Short Stories On Youth With Disabilities And My Adventures Working In The Disabilities Field

MIKE KELLY

“I’ve come across some incredible young people with disabilities who have achieved measurable success in their
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lives, yet whose efforts go largely unnoticed. And I wrote this book because I felt it was time for their untold stories to finally be shared to help inspire others to think outside the box and reach for the stars,” Kelly said.

When asked what types of disabilities his book features, Kelly said: “ADD/ADHD, Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Down syndrome, Intellectual Disabilities, Learning Disabilities, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Spina Bifida, Visual Impairment, Williams syndrome, to name just a few.”

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention state that roughly 1 in 7 American children have a developmental disability—over 3 million kids nationwide. Because of that number, one would think that there would be many books prominently featuring youth with disabilities. But according to Kelly, that's just not the case.

“While there are many books written by parents or teachers on how to raise or teach a child with autism—or

childrens’ books featuring a single character with a disability—I could not locate a single book featuring different kids with various types of disabilities, highlighting their successes and challenges, all in one book,” said Kelly. “Sadly, the publishing industry said ‘we don’t publish books of that subject matter.’ So I did.”

“Now, with *SPECIAL STORIES...* there’s finally a book about individuals with disabilities for individuals with disabilities, parents of children with disabilities, special educators, workers in the disabilities field ... and everyone else.”

When Kelly was asked what his experience has been like working in Charleston, Kelly said: “When I began establishing my business in Charleston, I was initially concerned as to how I’d be received. Not only am I not from the South, I’m a ‘Northerner’ or ‘Yankee’ from the Northeast.”

Kelly smiles, tilts his head, and raises his eyebrows.

“Watch any TV show the last few years and you’ll see Northeasterners

depicted as morons, drunks, big hair and nail drama and scream queens, and people with perpetual tans and limited vocabularies. Oh, yeah—and mobsters. Not the best representation of the Northeast. Even though I’m none of the above, I was worried that I’d be viewed similarly.”

“My concerns were completely unwarranted. The folks in Charleston are warm, friendly, and hospitable. They embraced my wife and me, my work, and—most importantly—they embraced my students. And for that, I am grateful.”

SPECIAL STORIES... has gained positive reviews from local sources including Charleston InsideOut, The Folly Current, and by Charleston artist Jonathan Green; an internationally acclaimed painter of the southern experience.

Kelly hopes *SPECIAL STORIES...* gains support from the disability community and parents of children with disabilities, to help spread the word of his new book. For information on *SPECIAL STORIES...*, visit www.specialstoriesbook.com.