

The impact of the iBELIEVE Foundation on my life personally and professionally has been profound in ways I never could have imagined. I was first introduced to iBELIEVE at the end of my first year of high school. I was one of a number of names that rang over the intercom as we were to report to the guidance office. A group of my peers and I were told we were selected by our teachers to attend a leadership camp in the summer of 2016. However, that description does not do my experience justice. iBELIEVE is more than simply a leadership camp as my teachers had described it. As a student from Vincent in rural Washington County, I was just happy to be chosen for this experience. Soon, my experience became so much more than simply being happy to be there. When I was a delegate, I was presented with challenges and opportunities to navigate them in a controlled environment that pushed me to achieve what the organization already knew I was capable of. I was given the opportunity to start building a network of students my age from throughout the Appalachian region. I was then asked to lean into my new peers and trust that we had the ability to create positive change in our region if we do it together. For the first time in a direct, positive way I was shown that regardless of who we are, what we look like, or how we speak, we all have the capacity to impact others in positive ways. iBELIEVE showed me that who we are matters, but we are not all that matters.

As my time as a delegate wound down and I looked toward staffing workshops with iBELIEVE, I was not expecting the impact the organization would continue to have on me. iBELIEVE gave me yet another opportunity, this one to facilitate activities with students as they learned to work together, understand what makes each of them who they are, and become passionate about the roles they can play in their communities. Since then, I have seen my former delegates continue to flourish. Whether they became the first in their family to attend college, started service initiatives in their schools, or better understood the importance of work they were already doing in their communities, iBELIEVE provided each of these students with the same opportunities and support system that I was given years earlier. After being unable to staff for two summers, I returned to iBELIEVE in July of 2022. Each week, iBELIEVE holds a small fundraiser for a local organization near the host campus. That workshop at Ohio University was the same week as the catastrophic flooding in Appalachian Kentucky, which then became the fundraising goal. I watched a group of less than one hundred delegates and staff raise over \$2,000 for flood relief efforts. I was speechless, I cried, and I have never felt prouder of a group. When iBELIEVE is funded, the impact does not stop with the organization. We enable students to use the tools they learn and experiences they create to be part of further change in direct and meaningful ways.

Now, I am here in front of you and can attest that I would not be where I am today without the iBELIEVE Foundation. I am the first in my family to graduate from a four-year college, less than a month out from receiving my Bachelor of Social Work from Capital University. I would not have even applied to Capital had it not been for one of my close friends on iBELIEVE staff encouraging me to do so. My experience with networking and understanding resources through iBELIEVE are exactly why I chose to become a social worker. I utilized my support systems on my own campus and others that came directly from iBELIEVE to get through some of the most difficult points in my life throughout those four years. Less than a week before graduation, a friend who graduated the year before told me she met one of my staff members from my time as a delegate working in Montana, further showing the reach of iBELIEVE's impact. I have a job with a nonprofit that serves the community I grew up in and I will be pursuing my Master of Social Work from Ohio University in the fall. I am doing work that I am passionate about and that fulfills me, something that not everyone has the privilege to say. I care about the people I have the opportunity to meet and want to listen to their stories. However, I am not a success story. I could be here all day telling stories of others who have had similar experiences with iBELIEVE. That's what iBELIEVE does. We do not make leaders; we enable and encourage them to be all that they already are. Funding iBELIEVE impacts individuals, schools, communities, regions, the state, and the country through the delegates served. You all have an opportunity to be part of that impact.

Best,

Bailey Harlow, BSW

Capital University '23