

# Aidan Massie

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iBELIEVE Alum (Jackson HS, Jackson, OH)  
Former Volunteer Staff Member

I first heard about the iBELIEVE Foundation in 2012, when my older brother, Cole, was selected by the staff of my high school to attend a summer workshop. After seeing the impact this Foundation had on him first-hand, I knew immediately, even before getting to high school, that this was an opportunity I needed to obtain. Now, over a decade later and five summers spent with the iBELIEVE Foundation, it's difficult to imagine the person I would be today without the impact that iBELIEVE has made on my life.

The iBELIEVE Foundation sets out to offer students across the Appalachian region with the opportunity to grow their leadership, communication, and problem-solving skills, and luckily for me, I was able to experience the growth of students in both a delegate and a staff role. For me, the biggest shift I've seen in my life, thanks to iB, has been through the importance of prioritizing community. During my first week as staff, we presented delegates with new material that I didn't have during my first delegate year, and that material was based around the concept of "Ubuntu." Ubuntu is a term that was created in Africa over 2,000 years ago, developed by people as the collective meaning for life to describe the kind of relationship an individual person is expected to have with their family and community; the term is often translated to "I am because we are." I cannot be all I can be unless everyone as a whole is all they can be--the better you are, the better I am.

My time spent with iBELIEVE has presented me with friendships that continue to impact me each and every day. While we are hundreds, and maybe even thousands, of miles apart, and we may not talk every day or every week, these friendships are the ones that are most important to me and help me consistently grow as a person. And while these friendships help me grow each and every day, it's more important to me to help us grow, because as a community, we are stronger together. I am because we are.

I point to iBELIEVE for helping me develop my leadership skills, as well as throwing me on an accelerated track to push myself further. I just completed my undergraduate degree earlier this month, earning my Bachelor of Fine Arts from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts in the heart of New York City. I could have never seen myself walking the bustling, diverse streets of the city without the change that iBELIEVE instilled in me. Everything that I walked away with from my time with iBELIEVE pushed me to become a better version of myself each and every day but also pushed me to seek out community to support me in doing so. While it is the largest city in the United States, New York can become an extremely lonely city, and because of the sense of community that iBELIEVE encouraged me to develop, I am still able to carry out the concept of Ubuntu everywhere I go.

While I could go on and on about my experience with iBELIEVE, no words will ever be able to truly describe the feelings and memories that I gained through the organization, no words will ever be able to describe the friendships and community I still hold on to, and no words will ever be enough to thank the organization and the people I continue to look up to for the lasting impact they've made on me. I just strive to continue to grow together with, and give back to, the community that shaped me and continues to shape me every day.

May 20, 2023