

Derek Demel

iB Alum (Athens High School, Athens, OH)
Former Volunteer Staff Team Member

I attended my first iBELIEVE workshop the summer after my freshman year of high school. I always considered myself an extrovert, so I was excited to meet others from schools outside of the Southeast Ohio area and go through all the workshop activities together. However, at this point in my life, I was also someone who sought comfort in a standard routine. I wasn't someone that hungry for adventure and spontaneity. Deciding to attend the iBELIEVE workshop honestly was something new and unfamiliar, and something I'm so thankful I did.

After going through that first week of summer workshop, my perspective totally changed. I became more willing to challenge the boundaries of my own comfort. I began to make more of an effort to immerse myself in new and unfamiliar experiences. I began to reach out to new people in my high school that I may have seen around but never talked to before. And I began to take a leap of faith into scary challenges and overcome the fear of failure. Sure these are traits that likely would've developed as I grew older, but I'm certain that the iBELIEVE Foundation was the catalyst I needed to give me this push.

7 years later, I am now a Senior at Yale University studying biomedical engineering. The thought of even applying to a school like this is something I would've immediately shrugged off before workshop. And thankfully, the hunger for adventure and new experiences has only grown in college. During my first year, I began to more seriously adopt the "never don't go" mentality from some of my peers; a motto that has encouraged me to take on a challenging major, join extracurriculars that I had never heard of before (a Cappella and Club Squash to name a few), conquer my subtle fear of heights through paragliding and rock climbing, and so many others. But most importantly, I learned that the friendships formed within a 5-day workshop 7 years ago truly can stand the tests of distance and time. I'm reminded of this every time I return home and grab coffee with a former peer, delegate, or mentor.

Because of the iBELIEVE Foundation, I've become inspired to go after every incredible opportunity presented— even if it seems out of reach at first. I hope that this can be something that inspires other students to take positive risks. Thus, I make it a priority to stay connected with Southeast Ohio roots. For the past few summers, I have volunteered for the iBELIEVE Foundation as a staff member and have supported fellow Appalachians in the pursuit of higher education by sharing my experiences with college applications and passing on the advice given to me by my iBELIEVE mentors. I know that my love for the iBELIEVE Foundation will only continue to grow and as such, hope to further propagate those feelings of adventure, excitement, and yes— magic— that were instilled upon me as a freshman in high school.

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