

The iBELIEVE Foundation provides equitable and inclusive access to experiential opportunities for Appalachian youth to learn and continue to develop the skills, behaviors, and attitudes necessary for success in high school and beyond.

To date, 1718 Ohio high school students have attended at least 1 year of our Youth Leadership Workshops, since our programs began in 2011. This number does not include the amount of Ohio students who have attend any of our year-round programming such as our Fall Leadership Summits, Digital Leadership Academies during the winter, or Community Service Days. I am proud to say that all of these students were able to attend these events at no cost.

Not only do our programs promote important life and leadership skills that students can use far beyond their high school career, they also provide a space for students to be themselves without any judgement and to grow in their confidence. For some it is the first time they have ever been made to feel like they are good enough and that they have people who believe in them.

A 2022 Youth Leadership Workshop participant recently shared this feedback with us: "I've never truly felt like I belonged anywhere, I always looked different or was "too much" for everyone around me. Until I went to iBELIEVE. It was the best week of my life. I met people who enjoyed me for exactly who I was. I showed my true self and for one week not once was I ever judged and it was amazing. iBELIEVE is something I wish everyone could experience because it was amazing and the only place I have every truly felt at home!"

We have heard different versions of this feedback multiple times over the last 12 years. I have learned through my experience with this organization that if we want our young people to become the leaders of tomorrow, we must first show them they are worthy and capable of doing so.

The iBELIEVE Foundation, like many other small nonprofits, were greatly affected by the pandemic in regards to loss in charitable donations, which we are still working to overcome; and at the same time, are working to bring our program attendance closer to where it was before 2020, all while combating the rising costs of hosting these events.

We persist because we know the impact of our programs are vast, and the young people that we serve need to know that they matter and are worthy of opportunities like this. More importantly, they need access to opportunities such as ours, without the barrier of cost. Opportunity should not be a luxury.

We have asked for a moderate increase for this budget cycle (from \$200K to \$300K per year). The increase will support our year-round programs for Ohio students, and will also allow us to add a much-needed full time employee to our team to aid us in our growth efforts. I kindly ask for, and greatly appreciate, your support in this matter.

Respectfully,

Stefani Murray
Executive Director
The iBELIEVE Foundation