

Millard Fuller & Ryan



Interview with Cleveland Habitat Alum, Ryan Iafigliola

The Fuller Center supports families and communities where needs are unmet. There are Fuller Centers in many small rural areas and some cities as well as in 20 other countries.

Ryan Iafigliola, VP of International Programs at the Fuller Center, is Cleveland-raised and a former Cleveland Habitat volunteer. After college, Ryan moved to Americus, Georgia, where Habitat was founded, to volunteer for a year as Millard Fuller's Special Assistant.

In Ryan's current role, he supports transformational housing projects around the world, helping families move from mud homes or slums into healthy homes and communities as an expression of God's love. It's truly life-changing work, and the Center works with 500-600 volunteers who travel each year to experience it first-hand.

1) What was your experience like with Cleveland Habitat?

It was a powerful experience, captivating my imagination and sense of calling, which led me to start a Habitat Campus Chapter at Padua Franciscan High School. Later, I helped lead the chapter at the University of Notre Dame. It is where I first heard the inspirational story of Millard Fuller, the self-made millionaire who along with his wife Linda gave it all away to see where God would lead them. We now know their act of faith led to their founding of Habitat.

2) What lessons were learned while working with Habitat founder, Millard Fuller?

Millard Fuller was the most dedicated person you'll ever meet. It seemed like every waking moment he was doing something focused on getting more people to donate or volunteer to help families have a decent place in which to live. He was deeply and authentically motivated by his faith in Jesus and taught me, "You don't have to exclude Jesus to include others." President Jimmy Carter has said he worked harder than anybody and often called him one of his "greatest heroes." His sudden passing in 2009 remains a kick to the gut to this day. He was truly a fearless man who made the most of his time on earth.

3) Thoughts on housing organizations on racial inclusion both currently and historically?

When Millard and his wife Linda gave away their fortune, they had no idea what would happen next. They happened to cross paths with Koinonia Farm, an integrated Christian community founded in the deep south in 1942 by the New Testament Greek scholar Clarence Jordan, who became Millard's mentor. So from their earliest days when they began building, Millard recognized that the work that we do is about more than houses, it's about bringing people together across lines -- especially racial lines -- that for too long divided us. And he knew that families and communities without decent, affordable and stable shelter would inevitably struggle, and for too long that opportunity had been denied to many Black families.

Millard was revered by the Black community in this area and received numerous awards and honors for his efforts. If Millard were alive today I think he'd be leading the way to channel the release of all this suppressed energy into making the world a better place, working side-by-side and together.

