

They Completely Accepted and Cared for Me

Mady McColm, 2018-19 NBA XPLOR Resident in St. Louis/Missouri



The circumstances that led to my XPLOR year were... unique. A month before the start of the program, I was injured in a car accident. My leg was broken in three places, and I was supposed to be in a cast and non-weight bearing for three months. From the recliner in my parent's home in Kansas, the odds seemed insurmountable for me to continue as an XPLOR resident.

In conversations with XPLOR staff, they believed that my setback would not be a barrier for me to continue in the program. In

fact, they were confident that they could make it work for me if I wanted to. I was hesitant, but after speaking to the church administrator and the pastor from our host congregation, I decided to go ahead and take the plunge. I was quaking in my cast when my parents dropped me off for our training. I had no idea what I was rolling into.

The St. Louis XPLOR house is an interesting set up because the residents actually live in an apartment inside of Union Avenue Christian Church. Because of this unique set up, the church staff were positioned to provide a lot of support and assistance to me in those first few months. We had a system: every morning, Ron, the church administrator, would drive me to my internship site and Pastor Michael would pick me up. We did this song and dance every work day for four months.

This is not the only support that the church provided. When I could not access the laundry room in the basement of the church because of the stairs, Michael took me to the laundromat. Ron drove me to all of my doctor's appointments, some of them out of town, and always treated me to lunch afterward. Various church members signed up to take me to my physical therapy appointments, and they gave me tips on the best way to bring up concerns with my doctors. I was gifted food, words of wisdom, and encouragement. Everyone was curious about my progress, and many shared with me times that they struggled with their mobility and stories of their journeys navigating the medical world. Every person who reached out to me during that time holds a special place in my heart.

In addition, my roommates did everything they could to make me feel comfortable and cared for. Memories of my first few weeks of XPLOR include my roommates struggling to push my wheelchair around the St. Louis Zoo, visiting different public libraries to find one that was ADA complaint, and hauling me and my crutches to a drag show in the Grove. We were strangers meeting for the first time, and they accepted me and all the challenges that came with me immediately.

People talk a big game about discipleship and “changing the world”. Sometimes, I think of making an impact as making global changes, single-handedly fixing the system, or sticking it to “the man”. But here in St. Louis, this congregation is actually changing the world, or at least changing my world. I have learned so much this year, but one thing that I will keep with me forever is the love and acceptance I have experienced from the members of my church. I never expected to find a home in our little church apartment.

I don’t know if I can ever repay my community for the love and generosity that they have given me, but I am going to try. I have accepted a position with Union Avenue over the summer at the Urban Mission Inn, a summer youth program. And XPLOR is not finished with me yet, as I have signed on for another year in Charlotte, North Carolina at QC Family Tree. While I am sad to leave St. Louis, I am excited for the next phase of my life, and I know that I will always have a family at Union Avenue and with my fellow XPLOR roommates.

P.S. My recovery is complete. I am walking, running, and scaling the bell tower of the church as we speak. :)

NBA XPLOR is a 10-month service residency opportunity for young adults ages 21-30, with the purpose of empowering young adults to discern and develop a “heart for care” as they live together in simple community, engage in direct service and justice work, engage in leadership development, and discern their vocational calls to honor the various communities they are called to serve. **Learn more and apply at nbacares.org/xplor.**