

I Believe in You

Mady McColm, 2018-19 NBA XPLORmore Resident in Charlotte, NC

An Open Letter to XPLOR Residents:

I am addressing you today because I know that some of our support systems are confused by what we are doing and why we are doing it. Our well-meaning friends and family want us to find comfort and success, quantified by the number of digits tacked on to the end of a salary. These people are looking out for you in the best way that they know. In a scarcity mindset, the stipend that we receive during our time in XPLOR is small enough to worry any parent about food or bills. They have not lived in the abundance that we are experiencing in our program.

So, the temptation is this: you finish XPLOR, and life returns to normal. You get the job that mom and dad have always wanted for you, you start making six figures, and you go about your life. The story that society wants for you to tell is that you took a year off after college to do some service before you came back to real life. It pads your resume, and you can give yourself a pat on the back for the good work that you did when you were young.

But that's not why this program was created. If we allow ourselves to accept it, the things that we learn during the ten months in our residency can completely alter the course of our lives.

In fact, I needed a double dose of these lessons, which is why I have signed on to do a second year of XPLOR. During my time in St. Louis and now in Charlotte, I have seen incredible things. I have seen wealth disparity and the health and social implications of that divide. I have seen resilience in the face of insurmountable adversity. But, more than that, I have held hands with people across all walks of life, and I have heard their stories. I have seen true selflessness in action. I have seen communities transform.

These stories are now my story. They change the way that I interact in the world. For me, there is no life to go back to anymore. My goals have changed, my paradigm has shifted. I no longer quantify success or compare the trajectory of my life to my peers. And all I needed to realign my focus was to listen and be present in the opportunities that XPLOR provided for me.

This world is often isolating, hard, and painful; yet, XPLOR has asked for us to be interconnected, soft, and vulnerable to that pain. That's countercultural. I believe that it's this framework that is going to save our planet.

If there was any group uniquely designed to tackle this world's problems, it is us. Let's collectively decide to not give up. Let's resist the narrative that tells us that things can never change. Let's not get boring jobs and retire in the suburbs. Let's continue to live interesting, cross-cultural, community driven lives of abundance. Let's start shaking things up, and let's do it together.

I'm not saying that you have to start a nonprofit right now, or go vegan, or singlehandedly take down "the man." But there is some way that you, and only you, can uniquely contribute to making the world better in your own way, from wherever you are. It's all about tapping into the authentic spirit inside of you, and finding what you love in the world, regardless of what anyone else thinks.

XPLOR is a gift. It is commitment-free, hands-on learning. It is a moment for pause before you begin a career, or go back to school. It allows you to focus on your understanding of the world, both physically and spiritually. Doing XPLOR is probably the best decision I've ever made for myself.

And my challenge to all of us, myself included, is to use our time to grow, and commit ourselves to a cause outside of ourselves, whatever that may be. Let us not continue to dwell on the words of people who say, "It'll never work!" and instead, remember that there is an army of support of people who have completed XPLOR or believe in this program behind you. I challenge us to be outraged by injustice and inspired by hope, and to never dim our flame for anyone. We are the future, and we are a group that I believe in.

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.**