



National Benevolent Association

XPLOR
FAITH, JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY

The Struggle is Real... But Thanks for the Memories

Ian Pollard, Melissa Peralez, Mary Taylor
2017-18 NBA XPLOR Residents in Hiram-Mantua, OH

Hiram-Mantua, Ohio is the farthest NBA XPLOR host site from all the other sites. It has been a house inside joke that we are the North from "Game of Thrones." Dealing with winter this year has confirmed that this house is indeed the House Stark. For the huge amounts of support and love we all have been given this year, we thought it would be best to give thanks and recognition to all that have influenced our lives.

Ian Pollard

Host Congregation: Hilltop Christian Church

Community Engagement Sites:

Family and Community Services, King Kennedy Community Center



"Living Simply" is more than just living with roommates. It hasn't been easy for me trying to live with different people whom I never choose to live with. It's not all sunshine and roses in the house. There have been times where literally the house could be on fire due to all the tension. The house dynamic really does play an influential role on how you move forward with this program. As much as there has been tension between the three of us, there has also been just as many laughs and enjoyment. As a house, we had to live with each other

and work around the differences. By doing this, the three of us were able to make the year unforgettable. These past nine months have flown by.



In a very short summary of my time here I have experienced growth in my own professional development at my community engagement site, gone outside of my box by preaching for the first time with a powerful message, traveled to Washington D.C. to experience the Ecumenical Advocacy Days conference, partake in lobbying the senators' representatives on immigration, making a difference in the lives of the Chi Rho United middle school youth group, and creating

memories with wonderful people. I have been blessed with being able to meet many people who have been able to influence my own life during my time here. Without these people, I don't think my time as an XPLOR Resident would have been memorable and enjoyable.

Bonnie Osei-Frimpong, the XPLOR Leadership Team, and the NBA: You all saw a vision for an influential program geared toward young adults. Without your push, none of this would be happening right now. Your loving support for our lives is seen and heard. I can't thank you enough for the opportunities that you all have created for me in this program.

Host site team for Hiram-Mantua: I want to thank every single one of you for taking the time and patience of planning for the year. Without your preparedness, we would certainly have struggled. Your contributions of love, time, and effort to make this year memorable has been a success. Thank you for being our support system, we couldn't have done anything without you all.

Hilltop Christian Church, Hiram Christian Church, and Mantua Center Christian Church: Going into a new church environment and not knowing anyone can be a real struggle... especially if you fear your own theology doesn't match the church's theology. I have been lucky enough to come into these three congregations and been able to feel loved, welcome, and be myself. The love behind every member of these churches is seen through their service. I want to thank everyone in the congregation who has helped the XPLOR Residents in some form of way. Thank you!

Chi Rho United Youth Group (special shout out to Chad Delaney, Kim Guy, and Carol Magyarics): If I had to choose one thing that has really impacted me the most in my time

here in Ohio, I'd have to choose my experience working with the Chi Rho United. Working with the incredible leadership team as well as the amazing middle school youth has really moved me. You all welcomed me with open arms and trusted me with a leadership role that in the end has made a difference in my life. I have enjoyed the countless hours of conversations with every single middle school youth, commitment of planning hours for each youth group, and the sleepless nights of several lock-ins we have done this year. I'm going to miss being a part of Chi Rho United as a leader. I can't express the amounts of joy and energy these youth bring to youth group. My experience in working with youth is that I strive to influence their lives and it turns out that they influence my life. I can't thank the youth and the leadership enough for making this year an incredible year.

Linda Idoine: During our time this year, we spent every week with our spiritual companion discussing our faith and learning how to grow in our own spiritual development. Linda you have shared your heart and touch each of us in some way. Your experiences and your own personal faith journey inspire me to go out and share my truth. Thank you for always seeing the good in everything that we did.

Jon Secaur: Jon, thank you for all that you have done to help make our stay in Ohio memorable. Your sincere presence and commitment to helping us out this year has been a great experience. I have enjoyed our many dinners with each other (with Linda of course), conversations, and car rides. Linda and the many future Residents are lucky to have you in their lives. You are truly remarkable. Thank you for making a difference in my life.

Former XPLOR Residents Sarah and CJ Dyer: I have been so lucky to have gotten the chance to know you both during this year here in Hiram. Your friendship will never be forgotten, and this is only the beginning. You both have made an impact on my life and I'm glad to call you friends and most of all family. Sarah, your bubbly personality is contagious. Your selfless deeds of showing others with kindness and love are truly a gift. Your light shines bright and you're able to make a difference in people's lives by just being near them. CJ I'm so happy to meet you this year and I have enjoyed our friendship through many games of *Magic: The Gathering* and for getting me into playing *Dungeons and Dragons*. There is something to say when we're playing for hours and crying from laughter. Thank you both for all your kind words and actions this year. I can't wait continue our friendship in the future years.

Tina and Eric Davis: Tina and Eric, thank you for the countless times you have opened up your home to us. I truly feel loved and accepted of who I am being around both of you. I appreciate everything we have done together. I really feel like I'm a part of your family. To

the many hours of watching *Harry Potter*, working out at the gym, friendship, and writing in the book club. Thank you for making an impact in my life and I promise to see you all again.

There are no words to express the amount of love and support that I have been given in this community. I couldn't have asked for a better time in Hiram-Mantua. Thank you everyone (even the people I wasn't able to mention) for making this year unforgettable.

Melissa Peralez

Host Congregation: Mantua Center Christian Church (MCCC)

Community Engagement Sites: Hiram Farm/Little Village



I'm not going to lie: there were struggles, many struggles, and the struggles were real. Despite all of this, good came and it was wonderful. I was able to preach, teach, and learn from everyone. I met people I wouldn't have ever met if it weren't for XPLOR: **Chad**, a very down to earth pastor, who felt like more of a friend than some of the pastors from my past, thank you for being there and listening to me complain and allowing me to change your service from beginning to end so I can feel like I'm back home while honoring the women of this church. I also met **Kelly Owen**, who was not only my co-worker for the last part of the program, but she also gave me advice on life. Thank you for being the best you. To the **Davis Family**, my second family that invited me to Thanksgiving and New Year: **Tina**, thank you for letting me become part of your family during the holidays and letting me wash clothes between paychecks. Eric, for being my best friend and always making me laugh and smile. Jess, for all the random hugs and Evan, for letting me watch you play video games. To the **congregation of MCCC**, thank you for not seeing the color of my skin and loving me for the deep south Texan Hispanic I am. To **Hiram Farm: Missy Bookbinder, Cody Bauer, Dave, Deb, Sam, Kaylin, Yvette, Jake, Tyler, Paul, Roger, Becca, Shelly** and **Erin**, thank you for being there for me while I worked there and for understanding that it was best for

everyone for me to move on. To the **staff of Little Village: Courtney, Hannah, Joe, Ms. Kelly, Mrs. June and Mrs. Tina**, thank you for accepting me with open arms and dealing with my background check taking forever to come back (it was clear by the way). To my **roommates: Mary Taylor**, thank you for putting up with my snoring on the nights that I was dead tired from work or life and for having girls days with me. I will miss you. **Ian Pollard**, thank you for letting me deal with our differences my way and finally becoming my friend. To the other congregations, **Hilltop** and **Hiram Christian**, thank you for welcoming us every Sunday we were scheduled to attend your church. To XPLOR alumna **Lauren Frato** and **Kim Guy**, thank you for helping us through this year as much as possible. To **Dave** and **Pam Auble**, thank you for letting us live in your apartments and **Pam**, for giving me a ride to the doctor and pharmacist. To **Marcia**, thank you for also taking me to the pharmacy and giving me soup and jello when I had the flu. To the **Delaneys: Christin**, for being a temporary mom for me while my mom was miles away. **CJ** and **Josh**, for being your unique selves and **Avery**, thank you for being your goofy self. To **CJ Dyer**, thank you for our intellectual conversations. To everyone I met this year that influenced me, thank you. Last but never the least, this person that had the biggest effect on my life and I love her for it. This person was the best person ever, she fed us, she invited us into her house, and she took us on adventures; no words can describe how grateful I am to this person and how much she means to me. I am forever grateful to her for the impact she had on my life this year. I am leaving a completely different person than I was when I came because she helped me get out of my shell again, and I feel like the person I was before I went through the tragedy I went through several years ago. I feel like I can do whatever I put my mind to because of her. She will never admit that it was her who changed my life because of her humbleness and that's just who she is. She is one in a million and if I had the means to stay I would, just to be able to see her every day. Her cheerful smile and bubbly personality can change the atmosphere of the saddest room. She was a friend to all three of us. **Sarah Dowd Dyer**, THANK YOU!



Mary Taylor

Host Congregation: Hiram Christian Church
Community Engagement Site: Hiram College



The struggle is real. Living with people you've never met and working in a new job with its own rules, traditions, and expectations can be challenging for anyone. Add on the fact that it's in a location that wasn't a first (or second, or third) choice, and that you must get to really know the people in that new community - and the struggle is real becomes an understatement to say the least.

To all of you coming into XPLOR: Did you get your first choice of placement? Your second? Your third, even? If so, great! It could be an amazing year! Did you get none of your choices? That's honestly fine too. My housemates and I did not get our first choice of house.



And to be blunt - these wouldn't have been any of our first choices for housemates either. Tensions rose, things were said, and there were A LOT of tears from all three of us. Never did we think that this house would all make it to December, let alone May. Despite the struggles we faced as three very different people living in this house, somehow, we made it work (for the most part).

We've had game nights, inside jokes, movie nights, watched shows together, and introduced each other to our different styles of cooking and being. My work events have been more fun because these two have come out to help with Bingo, Springfest, and most recently Senior-Week. The end is in sight, but I will

honestly miss these housemates that made it through this year with me. So, to all in the future cohort, know one thing during your Residency. No matter the struggles that come in these communities you form, or the struggles that will inevitably occur with your housemates, you will come out on the other side.

As a house, sometimes it felt like it truly took the entire village to keep us together. The love that was provided by those in the villages of Hiram and Mantua were at times, overwhelming. No matter what was going on in the house or back at our individual homes, the members of these local churches and communities treated us with so much love and respect. They kept us warm through the long winter, fed at church potlucks and loved through all the year's heartaches, dramas, and discourses. There is absolutely no way we could have made it through this year without our Spiritual Companion, community engagement site colleagues, mentors, host site team, congregations, and the wonderful friends we made along the way that helped us through each of the four cornerstones.

While this was not our first choice of house, location, or people - I know my housemates and I can all genuinely say thank you so much, Hiram-Mantua and XPLOR team. We will hold the memories made and the lessons learned here close, even after this next month is long over.



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.**