

Walk the Walk

RJ Howard, 2017-18 NBA XPLOR Resident in Dallas, TX



The most important words that a person can say are "I will do better." These are not the most important words that anyone can say. I can attest, as a person, that they are what I have needed to say. The steps forward in life are shaped by the stumbles and failures that happen to us, and to those around us. When we decide that enough is enough and accept failure, growth stops - that is the end. "The most important step a person can take is always the next one."

- Oathbringer, by Brandon Sanderson

The above lines are an adaptation from a book I recently finished reading that resonated with me. I hope that between that, and everything that follows, there will be a good takeaway.

Dear Diary,

I applied for the NBA XPLOR program with basically no clue as to what I was getting into on the recommendation of a friend that "it sounded just up my alley." This happened just before the initial submission deadline, and then there was an extension to the date. I admit to being rather prone to procrastination, and that manifested alongside my doubts of this unknown. Long story short: I indirectly said "no" several times. Now I'm here at an XPLOR host site writing this blog post. It's weird how things work out.

Now that I am here I am able to say with reasonable confidence that I don't regret doing that at all, and it has turned out to be one of the more enjoyable undertakings of my short life. Part of this undertaking is working at a nonprofit organization in the area for a set amount of time during the week. It's related to one of the cornerstones that make up this program as hands on service/justice work. My community engagement site has given me the illustrious position of Universal Teammate. The title sounds great, and you can probably guess what it is. Surprise! I work in every department/position that they may need help with. I actually made a list of all the stuff I've done to date, and it is a lot. Here's what I remember off the top of my head. *clears throat and takes a deep breath* I've done floor tech, housekeeping, maintenance, life enrichment in three separate facilities, gotten my food handlers permit, received receptionist training, been a chaplain's assistant, been a social

worker's assistant, organized volunteer forms... Actually, that might be all of it. The point is that I've done a lot and I'm not even halfway through the program. More importantly, at least to me, I have had fun doing all of this.

Oh right, and my area is Dallas TX. Not to brag in the slightest, but the Dallas house of this cohort has the largest group of XPLOR residents within this program to date. There are 5 of us by the way, and yes. I am unreasonably proud of this. Thank you for asking.

Fun Fact: Our houses actually link back to another one of the cornerstones: living simply in community. On the surface, this sounded easy to me. In college, I already had 4 housemates so I imagined that there would no change. I was all set. As it turns out it is a bit more complicated than that. Living simply in community means more than just living together. There are shared activities, shared budgets, time commitments, and much more. Reading about what it means to live in that way does not accurately represent what it is like to experience it. Coincidentally that's why I gave a general list instead of an explanation. It would take someone much more gifted with words than I am to capture this life clearly and succinctly. Although, it also turns out that living simply in community is not particularly difficult.

XPLOR does not feel restrictive, and occasionally it even feels like I might be growing as a person - we'll see how it goes, and where I go from here. I do think this lifestyle does seem to suit me so I'd like to thank everyone who made this possible, and viewers like you. Thank you.

Sincerely,

RJ the XPLOR Resident, peace ambassador, Universal Teammate, and (unofficially) man of many titles

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.**