



National Benevolent Association

XPLOR
FAITH, JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY

An Open Letter to Incoming XPLOR Residents

Alex Cooper, 2016-17 NBA XPLOR Resident in St. Louis, MO

Dear Incoming Resident,

You are about to embark on ten of the hardest, best, and potentially most rewarding months of your life. You will build new relationships, network, and grow. But I hope—if nothing else—you learn more about yourself here.

This letter is to help with your transition into a time of intentionality, simplicity, love, and acceptance. I hope it will be as meaningful to you, reading, as it has been for me to write.



To start out, I'll hit the topics you're probably looking for: what to expect, what did I enjoy most, how did my placement turn out, did I get along with my roommates, etc.

I came into the program knowing it was new, and I was excited. I, personally, was expecting new friendships, new work skills, and to learn more about social justice, all the while being accompanied by three other people with similar interests. But was I in for a shock!

I gained new friends, yes, but they are more like my brother and sisters. I learned new work skills, including when to put my foot down and say “enough is enough.” I have learned more about social justice here than I ever could have imagined.

I was lucky enough to be in St. Louis, Missouri. A hot spot for systemic racism, social injustices, and communities that need help now more than ever. I thought this journey would be made with three roommates, but by the turn of the new year I was down to only two. Your vision of what your time here will be, may not turn out the way you wanted it. And that is okay. You are not alone. This program is what you make of it. You will grow in ways you cannot possibly understand right now, and that is exciting!

Here is the part that I hope you hear: this is going to be hard.

You are not signing up for a program that is a walk in the park. You have signed up for ten months that will stretch you, mold you, and form you into the person that God has called you to be. You will probably hit a point where you want to cry. Go ahead, cry. You may reach a point of wanting to throw a pillow at your roommate. Tell them how you feel, regardless of how hard that may be. You may feel alone, even though you are surrounded by people. It's natural. Your experience is unique, and yet shared with people all across the country.

Your roommates at times may be the biggest pain in your side, or you may not get along with them. But, I have developed some advice when you're in those moments.

These housemates are not just roommates. They are part of your program. They are an extension of your whole being these next ten months. When you find yourself in a situation where you feel annoyed, irritated, or fed up with them, I encourage you to see them as a part of your experience. They are people. They have valid feelings, emotions, and quirks. No two people are the same, and this program will prove that quickly. Know that they are your built-in support system, your shoulders to cry on, and are in the same program as you. You have people to relate to, and sometimes it's hard to remember that.

I encourage you to love each other openly, unconditionally, and without reservation.

And remember that you have NBA, your host team, your housemates, and years of former residents supporting you on your entire journey.

May you grow in acceptance, peace, and love.

With all of my love and support,

Alex Cooper

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.**