

Where Are They Now? Cara McKinney

Cara McKinney, 2014-15 NBA XPLOR Resident in North Hollywood, CA



In 2014, the National Benevolent Association (NBA) launched the NBA XPLOR Residency, a 10-month internship program for young adults. Centered upon spiritual and vocational discernment, the Residency offers 21- to 30-year-olds time and space to live in simple community and address social injustice. Residents serve with host congregations and community engagement sites, developing their leadership skills as Disciples.

Now in its fourth year, NBA XPLOR alumni are dedicating themselves to systemic justice work, as well as direct care and action, across the life of the church. We look forward to seeing where the call takes them!

In this story, XPLOR alum Cara McKinney shares how her experience with the XPLOR Residency led her to serve with another Disciples general ministry.

1. When was your NBA XPLOR Residency?

I was an XPLOR Resident from August 2014 to June 2015.

2. Where did you serve?

I served with AIDS Project Los Angeles (APLA), the North Hollywood Interfaith Food Pantry, and the First Christian Church of North Hollywood in Los Angeles, CA.

3. Where are you currently interning?

I currently work for Global Ministries as a Global Mission Intern in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, México. My placement site is Melel Xojobal – a non-profit that focuses on

defending the rights of indigenous children and teenagers in Mexico. Melel's website is melelxojobal.org.mx.

4. Why did you decide to apply for another internship within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)?

I decided to apply for another CC (DoC) internship because I enjoy working for faith-based organizations and because I knew I wanted to experience life in another part of the world; Global Ministries was the best option for combining those two desires.

5. What experiences, if any, did you have as an XPLORES Resident which are helping you as a Global Mission intern?

While I was an XPLORES Resident, I worked in communications at AIDS Project Los Angeles (APLA). There I learned a lot about gender and sexuality, as well as healthy sexual practices and HIV/AIDS prevention. Now, at Melel Xojobal, I give workshops to teenagers focusing on gender equality and equity, as well as sexual health and reproductive rights. What I learned while at APLA gave me a solid base for the workshops that I teach now.

6. How is your internship at Global Ministries different from your one at the NBA? How are they similar?

My internship with Global Ministries is similar to my XPLORES Residency in that the basis of the internship is the same – sharing what skills and abilities I have while learning from the skills and abilities of others. They differ in that here in Mexico, I arrived and didn't have a built-in community like I had while in Los Angeles with XPLORES. Here I have to work to build relationships and to be involved in church activities, while in L.A. it was part of the program, so it wasn't difficult to get involved or to build relationships.

7. How has your faith developed from before your internships, to your time at XPLORES, to your current internship?

Before XPLORES, my faith was basic. I went to church, read my Bible often, and didn't question what I thought I knew. During XPLORES I learned to, well, explore. I learned to look more into the things I believed and to not take everything at surface level. I learned to dialogue with my fellow residents about religion and I learned to look with fresh eyes upon aspects of

Christianity that I previously accepted without much thought. I use the critical thinking and analytical skills that I learned during XPLOR in my everyday life as a way to look beyond the surface and find out why I, as well as other people, believe what I do.

8. How has your approach to addressing social injustice changed in this time?

Before XPLOR, I was working in social justice-based jobs, but I hadn't had many experiences to back-up the work I was doing; I was doing the work from a purely theoretical standpoint. In XPLOR I learned *how* to ask when I didn't understand. Through XPLOR and through the experiences I had after XPLOR, I've come to experience the practical side of social justice work. XPLOR was the beginning of my hands-on social justice work. Now, I have experiences to draw on and mentors in my life who I can rely on to help me better understand a certain topic.

9. Do you have any advice for current and future Residents? If so, please share.

My advice for current and future Residents is to keep going. While what you're doing now may not seem to fit in perfectly with your current life plan, the skills that you learn as a XPLOR Resident will surely benefit you at a later point in your life – whether it is learning how to live in a new place far from home, learning what a professional position can be like, or developing a specific skill-set, it **WILL** benefit you in the future. Also, put an effort into building relationships, whether that be with people at your host site, at your community engagement site, or with your fellow Residents. The two Residents I finished the program with are still two of my best friends and I am thankful every single day that XPLOR brought us together.

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**