

On Communal Living

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One of the cornerstones of the NBA XPLOR program that has come to be my favorite is the practice of intentional communal living. However, when I was applying to the program the thing I was most apprehensive about was living with roommates. The only prior time I had lived with other people, who were not my family, was my freshman year at TCU, and it was such a bad experience I chose to live by myself for the remaining three years of college. Having several friends who have had or

are currently having tense relationships with their roommates, I was worried that this too would be the case for me. This was compounded by being unsure of how the people I would be living with would react to my gender identity.

It is a joy to be able to say that my experience living with Ashlyn and Paige here in St. Louis has been nothing but a blessing for me. From the beginning of our time living together I have enjoyed love and affirmation from Ashlyn and Paige. The weekend we moved into our apartment we decided to go out to hit a few bars, and wanting to ensure that I felt safe, they immediately suggested going to *The Grove*, a block of St. Louis home to several queer/queer-friendly establishments. That night I was able to share with my roommates the journey I took to openly expressing my gender identity, and in their reaction, they treated my story with care and support.

Chores can be one of the biggest sources of conflict within a shared living space. Paige, Ashlyn, and I made a commitment from the start of the XPLOR program to stay on top of our keeping our housecleaning duties and to hold each other accountable. Luckily, to my knowledge nobody has had to even remind someone else to do their weekly assigned chore. One thing I am particularly grateful for is that we have maintained our commitment to NEVER letting dirty dishes pile up; we empty the dishwasher right after it has been run and we consistently put our dirty dishes in the washer immediately after we are done with them. It might not sound like a big deal, but keeping the relatively small things from being sources of conflict has created a household culture practically free of significant tension. Any potential problems are addressed long before they create discord.

Tying into another XPLOr cornerstone—spiritual development—is a practice that has also nourished our communal living: regular meetings with a spiritual companion. Once a week, usually on Friday mornings, the three of us meet with Karen, a retired divinity school professor who serves as our spiritual companion. Our conversations are real, honest, and raw; we learn a lot about each other through those two hours. Karen’s living room and dining room table have become brave spaces where we are empowered to become vulnerable, and the things that are shared there strengthen our relationships with each other, with God, and help us to grow into the people we were created to be.

Though I had worries about this cornerstone of XPLOr prior to beginning my internship, living with Ashlyn and Paige has been a wonderful experience for me. I am so thankful for this opportunity to get to know two amazing individuals, and I am looking forward to seeing how our little community continues to grow over the next several months.

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.**