

Keeping The “Real World” At Bay

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At my first tenant union meeting, organizers from a Bay Area tenant’s rights organization explained that apartment complexes across the city have been bought up, turned into condos, and all of the tenants get evicted. They said, “this is the real world. This is what happens in a housing crisis. Luckily, we can work together to fight the real world.”

I thought a lot about the phrase, “the real world,” and how it has two uses. On

the one hand, it is used to condescend to young people. Many young people graduate college, or move to a new city, and people constantly remind them to perform everyday tasks in the name of entering “the real world”, as if none of their prior experience was real. The other time people use this phrase is when unspeakable tragedies occur. Evictions, illnesses, debt, and death are all integral parts of “the real world.”

In my time with NBA XPLOR, I feel very familiar with both uses of the phrase “the real world.”

I am always acutely aware that NBA is paying my rent while my neighbors struggle to keep up with rapidly rising costs. That I can’t be a real, responsible adult if I don’t have to fight with my landlord. However, because I do live in the real world, I am not immune from consequences. If the apartment complex I live in turns into a condo, it doesn’t matter who is paying my rent; the consequences are the same. For that reason, I have been starting to work with my tenant’s union and other renter’s rights groups. We need to protect ourselves from the unfair evictions that so often get written off as nothing, as “well, that’s the real world.”

On the second day at the Oakland Worker’s Collective, a project of my community engagement site Street Level Health, I met a man who had been experiencing wage theft, and he wanted help deciding whether to pursue a legal case. He had a good case, and he could win a lot of money in court if he pursued it, but it would take a long time to process, time that he could otherwise spend working. Unfortunately, this man had an ICE ankle monitor on, and ICE charges you to wear their equipment, about \$5-10 per day. If he could

not find stable income during his court case, he would risk deportation. This brave man decided that he wanted to ensure that none of his undocumented siblings would get taken advantage of by his former employer, and so he is pursuing his court case, with help from my community engagement site. We are assisting him through our job-matching program and helping him find low-cost shelter. In the real world, this man has so many odds stacked against him that it almost seems likely that some tragedy would befall him. Luckily, we can work together to fight the real world.

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.**