

Meet me in St. Louis

Marissa Bucklew, 2018-19 NBA XPLOR Resident in St. Louis/Missouri



19,872,000 seconds. 331,200 minutes. 5520 hours. 230 days. 32 weeks. 7 months. 40,000,000 cups of coffee, all captured in what feels like one blink of an eye. This is the space we have been given to grow and find our truths, and maybe even realized incredible personal myths. This is the time we have worked with once new communities that are now considered home. The moments we were given to create relationships that we will hold in our hearts for the rest of our lives. I have been searching for my path for 22 years, coming up short after every year. But here I am, 19,872,000 seconds deep into

this program, more aware of self than I have ever been before. This journey has reminded me that "all we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us."

Choosing this program was a jump into darkness with the hopes that it will present something beautiful and meaningful by the end. Imagine, we all committed 10 months to live in an unfamiliar community with strangers and hoped for the best. To most people in my life, this was not the next step for me, but I knew going into the last semester of my college career that it was time to do something drastic and unexpected. I will never look back on that blurred memory of decision with regret.

While in St. Louis, I have had the opportunity to work with Voices for Children and understand what life is like for children living in the foster system. This program has opened my eyes to this vulnerable population and reminded me that I have something to give to enhance change in my community. After seeing what the incredible employees of Voices work through every day, I firmly know that I would never be able to bear the work they do with these children, but what I do know is that I can support these warriors through my work in administration. Getting to exercise my degree in Human Resources, I have become a passionate and skilled professional, giving me opportunity in the work field that I would never have been eligible for right out of college. The most important element of this program is realizing my weaknesses in this role and how I can mend my experience by working harder to make them my strengths. I truly cannot imagine where I would be without the training my supervisor has given me these last few months. This is a gift that I will never forget.

Along with an incredible experience with my service site, I have been given the best



community of people I could have ever asked for. Mady, Jaclyn, and I have become three peas in a pod. There is not a day that goes by in our house that we are not all ready to see each other and talk about our days and plan something fun to do together. Once strangers, I cannot imagine not talking to these two for the rest of my life. On top of that, the three of us have become close with our XPLOR team, especially Michael, Ron, and Karen. We can always count on them in times of need or even when we just feel like grabbing a bite to eat at some of our favorite places. Union Avenue Christian Church has completely opened their arms to us, making sure we know that we are more than the girls that just live upstairs. And it gets better! Not only do we have each other and our church, but we also have the incredible

friends that we have made in the city. Admittedly nervous about meeting new people the first time I move away from Lynchburg, VA, I was pleasantly surprised to find a full living room of people we can all call on to be by our side. As I looked at all of our friends one evening, I knew I was blessed to live in such a diverse and open environment that would allow me to meet these incredible people.

Call it beginner's luck, but my first big move away from home has become one of the best experiences in my life. When my time here is over, I will take the lessons I have learned with me for the rest of my life. I will remember how I felt when I was separated from the people I love most for 7 months and counting. I will remember how people care for strangers when you engage in what they are passionate about and learn from them. I will remember what it means to make new lifelong friends and cherish the memories we make with them every day. But most of all, I remember what it feels like to see how I have changed from an unexperienced optimist to a strategic and responsible woman. Time to make the next 6,566,400 seconds - 109,440 minutes - 1824 hours - 76 days - 10 weeks - 2 months - and 16,000,000 cups of coffee count!

So, if you are ready to join me in this experience, Meet Me in St. Louis!

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.**