

NBA XPLORE Residency Takes A Disciples Village...

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NBA XPLORE

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As more and more Disciples learn about NBA XPLORE, one of the most exciting young adult programs in our denomination in many years, the question is asked again and again,

“Where did this program originate and how did it happen?”

So glad you asked... because the story is truly inspiring and informative about how Disciples partnerships are one of the best things going for our present and our future. It took just one person who was familiar with Volunteers Exploring Vocation (VEV), a program of the Forum for Theological Education, which itself is a consortium of nearly 20 faith-based intentional Christian living communities. She dared to ask the BIG QUESTION -

“Why don’t Disciples have such a program?”

Indeed - why didn’t we? Several months and meetings later, NBA called together a small team and provided substantial funds to enable the creation, promotion, and full birthing of XPLORE. Yes, Disciples were a little late to the party, but we were immensely gifted by the experience of the existing programs - especially the United Church of Christ leadership. Reading and studying the challenges of other similar programs provided XPLORE with “best practices” to integrate into our planning, as well as “mine fields” to side-step.

This fall, XPLORE will welcome it’s fifth cohort of new Residents, and the program has been richly blessed with many valuable partners from across the landscape of the Disciples world: Regional and General Church staff, racial and ethnic ministries staff,

and local pastors and members have all walked closely with us in launching this program. We are grateful for all of them.

But our greatest supporters and partners, who have been vital and integral to our success, are our Disciples-related colleges and universities and Disciples staff at non-Disciples higher education institutions. Wow! What a support they have been.

- We make contact annually with chaplains and directors of church relations at all 14 Disciples-related schools and receive tremendous support from them.
- We make on-campus visits annually to nearly all those schools and are welcomed with open arms for meals, coffee gatherings, and one-on-one meetings with prospective applicants.
- We make on-campus visits to non-Disciples colleges, as well as several state universities where Disciples leadership exists, and the welcome mat is right there for us.
- College Presidents host luncheons and dinners for us, college faculty invite us to guest-teach religion and sociology classes, preach at chapel services, and lead small group Bible studies; state university contacts open the door for us to meet with Deans and Vice Presidents.

In our first three years of the XPLORE program, about 1/3 of our XPLORE Residents were motivated to apply through campus visits. In our current year, over 40% were influenced by campus visits. In our 2018-19 upcoming cohort, 50% connected to XPLORE through campus visits.

In the early days of creating and launching XPLORE, I was privileged to attend a "spiritual mentors" training of another denomination to learn from their experience. That was extremely helpful, but my eyes glazed over when I told the group I was about to head out for visits across the country to about 10 Disciples related colleges and universities. They said,

"Oh, we never thought of doing that with our schools!"

Are you kidding me??? I could not imagine how XPLORE would have discovered and met so many of our applicants and future Residents without the strong, ongoing support of our Higher Education and Leadership Ministries (HELM) partner schools and General Ministry Office.

XPLOR has been richly blessed with "a Disciples village" of support... amazing partners in young adult ministry. True, we arrived at "the party" a little late, but oh my, this XPLOR experience is changing lives in ways beyond what was ever imagined. Look out, the Holy Spirit is on the move in our "Disciples village".

As the health and social services general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the National Benevolent Association partners with congregations, regions, general ministries, and a variety of Disciples-related health and social service providers to create communities of compassion and care. Founded in 1887 by six women responding to the needs of the day and on their doorsteps, for 130 years the NBA has continued to serve "the least of these." Learn more at www.nbacares.org.