

Former St. Louis NBA XPLOR Residents Reflect on the Novel Coronavirus

2019-20 St. Louis XPLOR House Residents

July 2020



NBA XPLOR Residents, a cohort of young adults, are challenged to grow in spirit, service, and justice during their program year. Our 2019–2020 Residents, living and working with Disciples congregations across the U.S., were dealt an additional challenge this year in the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of [the XPLOR response to the novel Coronavirus](#), we asked the residents if they would be willing to express themselves creatively or through a short written reflection as a way to navigate their feelings as they adapted to life under social distancing before their Residency ended

in May. We encouraged XPLOR residents to reflect on the ways the pandemic changed their world. Residents from the St. Louis XPLOR House chose to stay in the house until the end of their residency. Below, they've shared how it felt when they first heard about the novel Coronavirus and what the remainder of their time in the XPLOR program was like.

William Brickhouse

This year has been like nothing we have ever experienced. Within a week's time, the St. Louis XPLOR house went from going into our intern sites each morning to having to adapt to working remotely from our home. The COVID-19 pandemic prohibited us from any social, or in-person interaction with friends, coworkers and church members. For me, this became most immediate because I became sick within a week's time of the city shutting down. Because of a lack of testing, we were unsure if the illness was the Coronavirus, but we took every precaution necessary to contain the spread of the virus.

Although each of our workplaces resorted to working remotely, this did not leave us without work. Each internship provided us with tasks and projects that could be done remotely and would help benefit each organization presently and in the future.

The most secure and stabilizing messages to us came early and often from [Union Avenue Christian Church](#). Rev. Michael Riggs reassured our house that as long as it was needed, UACC would be a home to us. The Union Ave congregation was also there to support us in many different ways, whether it was through Facebook messages, homecooked meals, or needed groceries. This was a tremendous feeling of reassurance that we would not be alone during this unsettling time.

The pandemic provided the St. Louis house with a unique opportunity to grow as individuals as well as grow our feeling of community. We took advantage of the quarantine to learn new skills, but also to enjoy our time together. Through group cooking, movie nights, and lounging about in the early spring sunshine, we were able to embrace the moment with each other.

One of the brightest spots during this unfortunate and exhausting global event was our spiritual companion time. Madeline Holloway was an incredible support system for all three of us during this unsure time. She would check in on us throughout the week and make us laugh. Even though we moved to Zoom for a majority of our companion time, if we were able, we would spend some evenings sitting outside in the parking lot, at the recommended distance and enjoy everyone's company. These moments and acts of kindness provided boundless amounts of joy for all three of us and we would look forward to renewing those feelings each week. Our time shared during this global event will be something we will never forget, and I am grateful to have been able to share this experience with the St. Louis house and community.

Alex Keys



The past couple of months have been some of the most strange and scary times in my life. However, in these troubling times the XPLOR community has helped in tremendous ways. The church has been incredibly helpful supporting us and NBA's XPLOR team has been in touch with us to see how everything is going. Many XPLOR Residencies had to adapt to this new reality, and I was fortunate to work remotely from home. The St. Louis house is very blessed to end this year together and will treasure the moments we've had!

Corina Sosa



Ah, spring. A season of transition. We move on from donning the traditional garments of gloves and scarves wrapped around our noses and mouths to stave off the chilly air, to wearing gloves and masks wrapped around our noses and mouths to stave off getting infected during a pande—oh wait. That’s not what typically happens in spring? Somebody should have told 2020 that, I’m just saying.

Jokes aside, calling these past several weeks atypical would be an *understatement*. I remember putting about 10 extra dollars on my Metrolink card to hold me over until the next payday, after which I could load exactly how much I would need for the rest of the month taking the bus to and from my internship. I have not had to use my card *once* since the shelter-in-place took effect here in St. Louis, since bus riders are required to get on from the rear door of the bus and they no longer require any fare charge in order to reduce contact between passengers and the bus driver. I’ve only taken the bus about three or four times to go to the office for work-related things that couldn’t be done from home. Otherwise, my duties have been narrowed down to administrative tasks (transcribing, data work, etc.) that I either do from my bedroom or other rooms of the apartment, just to switch things up, ya know? There have also been weekly staff meetings via Zoom, so there is still somewhat a sense of normalcy in that regard. I am very lucky to even still be able to take part in my internship, as I know many of my fellow XPLOR Residents in other houses have not been. The other Prison Performing Arts (my community engagement site) staff members have been so supportive of me and each other, even in the midst of all the uncertainty of what programming is going to look like for the rest of the year. I have a feeling it will become more virtual for the time being.

Home life here at the apartment had its bits of ups and downs. We came up with a cleaning schedule and took part in daily temperature checks to keep ourselves ahead of the curve as we could. Unfortunately, we experienced an exposure scare, so we chose to quarantine. Thankfully, our host team was on it, bringing us plenty of food and snacks when needed so that we didn’t need to go out to the grocery store while we were under complete quarantine. For our Spiritual Companion time, we migrated over to Zoom, and Madeline was continuously on it with topics and themes to discuss during those meetings. When the weather was nice, we had a couple of outdoor meetings in the church parking lot, over ice cream or pizza provided by her, which was awesome. Overall, the spirit of the St. Louis house remains strong, even in these stressful and uncertain times, and I’m glad to be ending the year together with Will and Alex. Outside of the house, it’s been cool to have opportunities to connect with other XPLOR residents both past and present via Zoom calls. Some of us have even started a book club, which has gone great so far.

On a personal level, I have definitely been through some ups and downs emotionally. I’ve been able to stay connected virtually with people from both Union Avenue and my home church, [Galileo](#). In place of rehearsals, Union Avenue’s choir has been meeting weekly on Zoom, mainly to hang out and catch up with one another. I’ve also been watching live streams from both churches on Sundays. It has mainly been stressful to think about what comes after the program is over. Originally, I had planned on going

on a trip to Italy with Union Avenue's choir at the beginning of June, then staying in St. Louis through most of the summer working at the [Urban Mission Inn](#) here at Union Avenue and seeing the premiere of the play adaptation of *Hag-Seed* by Margaret Atwood at the men's prison in Bowling Green, MO in July. Now, with everything cancelled/postponed and the XPLOR program ending early, I am going back to Texas sooner than expected without much of a plan for employment. I'm hoping to have a job that I can do from home, but we shall see.

While the future is uncertain, I am grateful to have the support systems I've gained through XPLOR and for the ones I have back in Texas. And know this, as soon as it's as safe as possible to do so, I'm giving everyone I know (that is comfortable with it) a big, long hug, cuz the touch starvation struggle is real, y'all.

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.](#)