

Table Member and Sister Interview

Maria and Cosima were a Table Leader and Sister (respectively) on a Table in Richmond, VA. Their table, along with 6 other Table members, started in the May of 2017. True to the model, the Table met together for a whole year. Although the Table has officially ended, the relationships forged have not, particularly the bond between Cosima and Maria. Both ladies wanted to share their experience with us through answering a few questions.

What specific things did the Table members do for their Sister?

Maria: Our Table met for about 4 months before we worked on anything specific. We socialized and felt the need to build trust. One of the first things we helped our sister with was replacing the contents of her wallet that she had lost. We laugh about this because we felt like we were driving her crazy trying to help her get a few specific items. We helped with budgeting, doctor visits and general basic needs along the journey.

Cosima: My Table helped me gather my wallet back together after I had thrown mine away at work. I came to my Table asking for help and they all pitched in helping me get my wallet back together. My Table was understanding to all of my quirks, letting me know over and over that it was okay who I was. A lot of what my Table taught me was how to trust people, build a relationship, and further my relationship with not only person to person interactions, but community to community interactions.

What were your struggles/challenges with Open Table?

Maria: While I was on the table, my greatest challenge was the feeling that we weren't accomplishing anything. It is very hard to give up so much time each week and feel like you might not see any change in return. I learned, however, that change was happening, just at a slower pace than I had expected. I live with high expectations of myself and others, so allowing time to be what it is and change to be what it was has been a valuable lesson. I also struggled with my lack of knowledge surrounding mental illness and the challenges it presents to not just our brother or sister but also to our family and friends. I am learning more and more through the relationship with our sister and have been able to allow that to inform other relationships I am involved in. Mental illness is a battle that spans all demographics and all socioeconomic classes. We have a lot of work to do in this area as a nation.

Cosima: I had a lot of trouble asking for help. I didn't really run my meetings until the end of my year. I was anxious a lot of the time with them, but it developed over time, relationships with a few of my table members closer than others, which is expected! I think the weekly meeting was hard, but it taught me commitment. (My table taught me more than I know.) Since I had control, I knew I could cancel if I needed to. I held myself to high standards though because once I saw that they were committed to coming and helping after their long day, I knew I had to have the same commitment.

How do you feel that participating in Open Table has transformed you?

Maria: How can a person not be changed after being on a Table? I have learned so much about myself and so much about kids who have aged out of foster care. I am growing in my understanding of grace as it applies to us all, and about how to love unconditionally. You would think after being a Christian for most of my life, I would have that down....but....let's just say, we are all on this journey called life and I am better for having walked it with our Sister!

Cosima: A big issue we tackled in my table was my mental health. It has always been an issue for me and this is one of the first times I felt as if I wasn't dealing with it alone. They were there, supportive, and trust-worthy. I told them exactly how I was, receiving no judgement or negative tone from the group. Also, I am a giver. Even when I don't have enough for myself, I still give. I have a friend who is in a tough situation with two kids and a husband. I occasionally buy them food since it is so hard for them to at times. If I reached out to my Table or was already with a Table member they would give me money to help my friend. Which overall taught me to still give, but have enough for myself. Which has greatly reduced a number of mental health issues.

