

Where Are They Now?

Lauren Frato, 2015-17 NBA XPLOR Resident in St. Louis, MO and Tucson, AZ



In 2014, the National Benevolent Association (NBA) launched the NBA XPLOR Residency, a 10-month internship program for young adults. Centered upon spiritual and vocational discernment, the Residency offers 21- to 30-year-olds time and space to live in simple community and address social injustice. Residents serve with host congregations and community engagement sites, developing their leadership skills as Disciples.

Now in its fourth year, NBA XPLOR alumni are dedicating themselves to systemic justice work, as well as direct care and action, across the life of the church. We look forward to seeing where the call takes them!

In this story, XPLOR alum Lauren Frato shares how her experience with the XPLOR Residency led her to do another year in the program.

1. When was your NBA XPLOR Residency?

I was in XPLOR 2015-16 and 2016-17.

2. Where did you serve?

In 2015-16, I served in St. Louis, MO at Union Avenue Christian Church; my community engagement site was Neighborhood Houses. In 2016-17, I was placed in Tucson, Arizona. Desert Dove Christian Church. My community engagement site was The Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona.

3. What experiences led you to decide to do another year of NBA XPLOR?

I decided to do another year of XPLOR because in my first year of the program, I worked with children. I had been working with children before I entered into the program. I wasn't sure if I wanted to continue doing that. I also wanted to get experience in another field. So, when I applied for a second year, I asked the team if I could be put in a warm climate and at a community engagement site in a different focus area.

4. How did the two Residencies differ from one another? How were they similar?

Both sites were different because I was doing different work. My first year I worked with children, which I was used to. The second year I worked at a food bank. I was doing completely new work that I hadn't really done before. I felt like I was more involved in the church the second year, than the first year. My second year, I got the courage to preach. My community was stronger my first year than my second year.

The way in which they were similar is that in both places, I grew as a person. I met people who supported me. I learned new lessons in both places.

5. What lessons did you learn, if any, during your first year, that you applied to your second year?

My first year I really gained confidence in myself. I have always struggled with knowing that I am capable of doing things. I think I was able to carry that confidence into my second year. But it increased even more in my second year.

6. How did your faith develop before, during, and after your time with XPLOR?

I think that it took a lot of faith to even join the XPLOR. I think it really developed even more during. I feel I had to rely on my faith a lot in certain situations, especially when I saw so much hurt around me. I think that is when I really grabbed onto my faith. After my time in XPLOR I think my faith keeps growing as I keep seeing so much injustice around me.

7. How did your approach to addressing social injustice develop before, during, and after your time with XPLOR?

I will be honest, I wasn't very aware of a lot of the injustices around me. It wasn't until my first year in the program, that I began to learn a lot more about it. I definitely feel that I was

uneducated before I entered the program. My second year I feel I was more aware, but still continuing to learn more about it, especially being in another place. There were different kinds of injustices, and in both places, I was able to learn about it, but also take action.

8. How did the XPLOR Residencies, if at all, lead you to where you are in your life?

Before I entered the program, I was very unsure if I wanted to attend college. Going through the program allowed me to realize how important an education is. I realized that going for an education could allow me to further help others in my community, as well around the world.

9. Do you have any advice for current and future Residents? If so, please share.

The advice I would give to current/future Residents is this: Have an open mind. Don't allow fear to grip onto you. XPLOR will have challenges, but there will also be so many rewarding things about it. Be open to the different things you will see and experience. Be OK with being uncomfortable, because there will be times when you are. Allow yourself to grow in yourself, but also in your faith. Communicate with your housemates, it is so important when living in community. Take time for yourself, you are working for injustice here. It is very exhausting, take that Sabbath time when you need to. Lastly, I would say take advantage of every opportunity you have. And have fun! It will go extremely fast.

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.**