



National Benevolent Association

**XPLOR**  
FAITH, JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY

## A Love Letter to Laura

Anna Westin, 2015-16 NBA XPLOR Resident  
in Quad Cities, IL/IA



Applying to NBA XPLOR was a big step for me. I was making a conscious decision to not be comfortable. I had something for almost every day of the week at my home church; I got to work at an awesome preschool with kids whom I loved; and I was just working my way into a job at the local Christian Academy. I could have easily stayed in Lakeport, and made an easy life there. But I decided to up and move to Iowa with two strangers, become a part of a congregation where I knew no one, and start an internship doing a job I had no experience with. It was pretty terrifying. Exciting, but terrifying.

And if we're being honest, it has been hard being 27 hours away from everything and everyone I call home. I have learned a lot about myself that I was not anticipating. For example, I have this thing in my brain called a "quit response." It's exactly what it sounds like; whenever a situation gets too hard, or stressful, I abandon it completely. I've always chalked it up to "self care." And being in Iowa, away from my regular support system, has been potentially the hardest thing I have ever experienced.

Coming into NBA XPLOR with the idea of building a similar relationship with Laura, our spiritual companion, as I have with my home pastor seemed like a stretch, but then I met Laura at XPLOR Laboratory in St. Louis. I knew immediately that she was, as Bonnie would say, my tribe. Although it sounds like being a member of a large group of people, I can confidently say that my tribe is made up of a handful of humans whose souls are made of stuff very similar to mine.

The first thing I noticed about Laura was the light she brought with her when she came into the room. I thought, "This is the kind of person I need on my team." She is someone who hears because she chooses to listen. Since meeting her, Laura has become so much more to me than my assigned spiritual companion—she is my friend. Laura is one of the rare people on this planet who sees people. She sees through who we're trying to be seen as, and challenges us to know ourselves better.

When I told Laura that my head space was not the happiest place to exist, she didn't give me a generic response. She was not only compassionate; she told me the truth. She is honest, even (especially when, perhaps) it's hard to hear. I think something that is really special about Laura is that being a spiritual companion for the Quad Cities XPLOR house isn't just something she is doing in her free time—it's something that God put on her heart. She's passionate about helping us not only find our vocations but also truly motivating us to rise to the challenge and grow into the people that God has created us to be. She reminds us that this journey is just as important as the goals we're trying to achieve.

Meeting Laura has changed me for the better, and I hope to continue to grow and learn from her in the years to come. So, thank you, Laura for believing in my potential. Thank you for your friendship. And thank you for being a light in this broken world and an example of what love looks like.

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*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](http://nbacares.org/xplor).***

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