



## Summer 2 Reflective Report

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### Leadership in Action experience

In the summer of 2022, I moved to New York state in the United States from Switzerland to begin my journey of summer 2. I aimed to explore ways to implement my knowledge and help the community with my passion for biomechanics. Biomechanics is the science of motion which is very innate to the human body. This field is like Pandora's box for knowledge that can improve lives in a multitude of ways. Understanding how your body moves allows us to improve our physical and eventually our mental well-being. However, it was apparent to me that there was a lack of resources that provided this accessible understanding of biomechanics. So, I had my lead; I set to design my own project that would bridge this gap between the scientific and the non-scientific communities.

The objectives of this mildly definitive game plan were as follows. First, interview some non-scientific groups as well as academics. Second, collaborate with academics and artists to curate designs that would explain some concepts of biomechanics. Having such a diverse set of stakeholders would allow me to understand the topic from perspectives unknown to me. It also allowed me to hone my skills to tap into my network of people and collaborate on projects that were important to more people than just myself. I would be utilizing my experience of working in multiple labs from different countries and the lessons I have learned from their lab cultures. I was also equipped with my refined understanding of the subject from summer 1. I was also trained through the wonderful leadership sessions curated by the team at Laidlaw in understanding resilience and self-care, exploring trust, and other elements necessary in one's leadership journey. The challenges I foresaw were getting involvement from outreach faculties, lack of interested stakeholders, resistance from the public in getting engaged, and time constraints in getting good output- perhaps an exhibition of sorts. Given my previous experience and training in overcoming such barriers, I also brainstormed some cures. This would involve reaching out to outreach faculties via my university and Laidlaw network. I would also utilize Laidlaw's generous project funds to increase engagement and find tools to brainstorm and design my project.

So, with all of this in my inventory, I landed at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. Here, I was hosted by the brilliant Prof. Karl Lewis and his biomedical imaging lab team. I have introduced the American research culture and the world of academia. My supervisor put me in touch with a great set of academics that I then planned to interview to understand their specializations and motivations for studying biomechanics. I too went on my own little detours where I would end up in a part of this new town completely unknown to me in the middle of pouring rain and no transport. (My professor and his team after learning of my inability to sit still did make sure I had the support I needed so I don't end up truly stranded!) I would end up talking to a musician busking, or a sweet receptionist in a medical facility who would be interested in biomechanics or know a librarian who used to teach dance! I would walk around the beautiful campus of this ivy league school and find fun student groups helping kids from underrepresented backgrounds get interested in art! I also made friends with the librarians,

especially at the fine arts library who showed me a whole other world of art that captures this science of motion. The project was in motion.

Unlike my previous year, this summer had fewer difficulties. Given that I started to work and prioritized my health, my project was well-nourished. There were still times when I would feel under the gun due to over-scheduling meetings and interviews. Speaking to 20 new people in a week could take a lot from oneself. There were also times when I would forget the weekends existed. However, given I was extremely involved and adored what I was working on, it felt fine. Work-life balance is work in itself; it seems. It also took me more than just those 6 weeks of work prescribed by the program. I worked on allowing myself the pace that the project and I deserved to not feel another wave of burnout and produce high-value content. At the end of 9 weeks, I was thrilled to see that I had managed to create a book by working with 18 contributors from all over the world!

This book offers an artistic exploration of what it means to be such miracles of movement. We explore questions such as why our backs hurt after watching hours of TV, how not to spill our coffee, what goes on in our legs when we dance, and more. We invite you on this journey for a good cause — all the money you give for the book goes straight to our selected charities. Check it out [here!](#)



We chose two charities that we believe truly were working hard for their respective missions.

The first one is called Jnana Prabodhini in Pune, India. This foundation promotes activities for drought relief, energy sufficiency, healthcare & women empowerment to fulfil basic needs in rural India. Check them out here: <https://www.jnanaprabodhini.org/>

The second one is Lauralynn which is based in Dublin, Ireland. This charity aims to provide a Community of Care that delivers evidence-based, personalized services to children with palliative care needs, complex care needs, and complex disabilities, while also providing family support services. Know more about them here: <https://www.lauralynn.ie/>

I had a truly rewarding time working beyond the scope and timeline prescribed for the project and ended up creating a legacy that already raised around 550 euros! This is being split between the two charities. This experience allowed me to provide a platform for 18 other brilliant students from different countries to practice and showcase their talents. I also ended up forging deep meaningful friendships and partnerships with people I worked with during the creation of the book. And nothing felt more sublime.

### **Shifts in Leadership style**

Through the rollercoaster of my 18 months in this program, the word 'leadership' has taken many forms. And what constitutes good leadership has seen multiple morphisms. It has changed from leading from the front, leading from the back, to just being and growing together. It now means to listen to every person- everyone is an inspiration to learn from and to be better (Thank you sweet old man for whom I missed my bus- it was worth hearing you talk about the most random bits about Irish law).

Both summers have contributed to my learning of the dynamism of leadership. The first summer allowed me to hone my skills specifically in my field of science and interest. The second summer allowed me to apply this knowledge while also branching out and experimenting to create something of value for more than just one type of audience. The two summers worked so well because they were linked by multiple personality development sessions to allow the scholars to reflect and calibrate their learnings. It allowed me to experience an incredible understanding of widening my network. I have certainly expanded my frame of reference about it as a Laidlaw scholar. I have been proactive and have met wonderful people in every country I have visited in the past year- Ireland, Albania, Switzerland, and the United States. By being open-minded, I have experimented with nurturing different perspectives mothered by those varied cultures. I have explored self-trust and honed my resilience to go, alone, to any part of the world. And to ask for help when in need. Independence has always been a familiar trait for me, my struggle lay in accepting help and trusting in being a part of society.

Moreover, my approach to personal challenges has certainly developed through my leadership experiences during the last 18 months. I have been able to slow down, reflect and then respond. This took a bit of effort. I had been trained to get things off the ground rather instantaneously as that was considered the measure of success and talent. Speedy responses meant I did not allow myself to be honest with myself. Developing self-trust takes time. Creating tangible progress takes effort which also takes time. And I am practising being compassionate to myself to view my personal challenges with less judgement.

In summary, to say my overall experience has been remarkable would be an understatement. The programme has showered me with resources and connections that have been a parental force in nurturing my leadership skills. I have developed a cautious and ethical sense of working while not holding back. I have had many lessons in practicing the art of balancing different factions of my life. To be gifted with talents and resources is one, remarkable, thing. To be patient and encourage ethical use of all those gifts is another. I thank all the people I was lucky to meet during my journey there who helped with both.