



## Laidlaw Scholarship Leadership – in – Action Reflective Report

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Title of LIA Project:	<b>re_action for Impact: Empowerment of Minority Communities</b>

**Please describe the project/placement you have conducted during this period.**

Between July and August 2023 I was based in Mexico City taking part in non-profit organisation makesense Americas' *re\_action for impact* programme. The aim of this programme is to mobilise Laidlaw Scholars with the skills and cultural understanding necessary to help local communities build concrete actions to tackle socio-environmental challenges within Mexico City. The project I was assigned to focused on empowering of minority groups.

The organisation that my group was partnered with was [Muuch Creative](#), a social enterprise which aims to connect artists and indigenous artisans with public and private organisations in order to create commercial opportunities with their products and services. Our primary aim was to work with Muuch Creative to raise awareness of a project that they support - [iin ki kalante](#). Based in Yucatan, iin ki kalante (meaning *I will take care of it* in Mayan), is an independent cultural headquarters which focuses on developing artistic and socio-cultural projects which promote the accessibility of art within communities. Our job was to promote the work of iin



ki kalante within Mexico City and potentially on an international scale, with the aim of showcasing the benefits of accessible cultural education for all ages through art.

With a budget of \$14,000 MXN provided by makesense, we consulted with Muuch Creative and iin ki kalante to organise a cultural enrichment event, which took place during makesense's Impact Carnival held on 12<sup>th</sup> August 2023. The event involved an embroidery and drawing workshop (similar to the kind of sessions that are held by iin ki kalante in Yucatan)

The workshop consisted of iin ki kalante's Creative and Pedagogical Coordinator, Angel Aviles, with the support of the makesense volunteers, describing to participants three stories commonly told to children in Yucatan. The participants were then asked to draw a part of one of the stories which resonated with the most, before being taught how to embroider their drawings. On the day, we had participants staying



until the very end and taking home the materials they used to continue with their embroidery. Approximately 20 participants came throughout the day with most conversing with Angel, who in turn was able to have an engaging discussion about art. The age range of our participants was from as young as six years old to elder adults. Most attendees admitted that this was their first experience embroidering, and noted the tranquil effect of the activity. We were also able to sell several hand-embroidered bags by indigenous artisans from Yucatan for \$400 MXN each (c. # 20).

#### **How has the project you have been undertaking been impactful or important?**

The project has been impactful because we were able to share the important work that iin ki kalante does to a small audience. The long-term idea is that by having 20 people be exposed to their work, they will each share their experience of the workshop with another 20 people, and in turn, those 20 people will share their understanding of iin ki kalante to a further 20 people etc. After the workshop, some participants and volunteers enjoyed the activity so much that they created a separate WhatsApp group chat to allow them to share their embroidery journey with each other. Art is the most expressive form of storytelling and has many forms – this is the principle cultivated by iin ki kalante, and if just 20 people outside of Yucatan are aware of this, then I believe that we did our job.

#### **What impact has the LIA project had on you?**

The project has had a positive impact on me. I rekindled my love for making art, and gained an invaluable insight into the impact of grassroots projects that are led by members of the very community that is being targeted. In terms of the SMART goals I had set prior to arriving in Mexico, I believe I achieved them all. I had stated that I wanted to do the following:

1. Do adequate research on an indigenous group which is close to where I will be staying in Mexico. Research the population size, key issues that are prevalent in the community.
2. Attempt to learn basic Spanish phrases to assimilate with locals better.

3. Understand what it means to be a responsible ally and take care not to centre yourself during this project.

The goals pertain more to what I wanted to achieve overall, whilst on the programme, but I do think that as a group, we were conscious of ensuring that iin ki kalante was centred in all aspects of the execution of the project.

**What leadership skills do you believe you have gained/demonstrated during the LIA period?**

The first leadership skill I demonstrated as turning ideas into action. The idea of organising a workshop which would simulate a session akin to those typically held by iin ki kalante, was established very early in the ideation stage, and so I was determined to see it executed. I used the project management skills which I had accumulated through my placement year, to drive action. For instance, I was keen to have our meetings with Muuch Creative and iin ki kalante be minuted, and for deliverables to be established at the end of every meeting, due for the one to follow. This meant that everyone was always aware of what was required of them, and if there were any instructions that were not clear, then they could be clarified ahead of time.

The second leadership attribute I believe I demonstrated was working collaboratively and across boundaries. The power of having like-minded individuals in a team with a unified goal is unparalleled. My teammates, Isa and Jasmine, were fantastic to work with and very in tune with recognising the power of soft skills as well as project management. This meant that where one of us struggled, the other was capable of picking up the task on their behalf. We delegated tasks amongst ourselves according to our individual strengths, I was astute enough to recognise my weakness in public speaking and so volunteered to work on the brochure.

In terms of working with both Muuch Creative and iin ki kalante, I believe that the reason why the project was successful was because all parties treated this as a partnership, where everyone has equal opportunity to share their ideas. We held a total of five Zoom meetings with the organisations and had a WhatsApp group chat so that we could all communicate any ideas that could not be saved for the meeting.

When working with the volunteers, we were informed , prior to or initial meeting with them, that whilst they had originally signed up to work on the ‘empowerment of minority groups’ strand, that they were effectively randomly assigned our project. This meant that we had to essentially convince volunteers to commit to our project. We did this by being concise when creating presentation decks,



and engaging when delivering the content and emphasising in our presentation the indigenous aspect of iin ki kalante’s work.

Finally, I believe I gained the ability to navigate new and foreign situations. As someone who struggles with sudden change, adjusting to living in Mexico was initially difficult, and it meant that I had to put a concerted effort to not let that distract from my ability to work on the project.

**Please talk about activities you’ve been involved in to disseminate your project, including but not limited to attending conferences, producing research posters, and promotion of the project and programme**

In our first meeting with Muuch Creative, Nora, the organisation’s founder, discussed how she wanted the work between us and them to be truly collaborative and using realistic goals. Initially, we all discussed the idea of creating a social media marketing campaign that would help drive online engagement with iin ki kalante , ahead of the Impact Carnival. This would have involved creating posts that would be released in a timely fashion, and conducting long-form interviews with artists and participants from Yucatan, to be released in parts, again, ahead of the Impact Carnival. However, we recognised quickly that this was an ambitious feat, that realistically could not have been sufficiently executed in four weeks, hence why it was decided that we scale down the campaign to creating a brochure and poster, and using makesense’s international reach on social media to promote the workshop event.

We created a bilingual brochure from scratch designed to give people a brief and concise introduction to iin ki kalante. The information included a summary of the cultural art centre's work, methods and goals. We wanted the brochure to have longevity and be sure that the team at in ki kalante could re-purpose and add to it as they saw fit and so we kept the design simple, and the colour scheme in line with their logo colour scheme. In addition, we also created a promotional poster for the event. Furthermore, we wanted to make sure that we were not negatively contributing to the environment, and so generated QR codes that people could scan so as so prevent us printing lots of physical copies of our brochures.



the necessity of having Angel being the one to lead participants through the session. In order to organise the session, we reimbursed Angel for buying the resources needed to have the embroidery session. Also, we wanted participants of the workshop to feel as comfortable as possible, and so we organised catering for our workshop.

During the workshop we took promotional pictures and videos so that iin ki kalante could continue using them for future purposes.

We also conducted a pre-workshop training session with our registered volunteers that makesense provided. The purpose of this training was not only to familiarise themselves with the basics of embroidery, so that they in turn could assist Angel with conducting the workshop, but also become better acquainted with the work of iin ki kalante. We also paid for the plane ticket and hotel expenses of Angel Aviles as we recognised



**What are your future career or educational plans? Have these changed during your time as a scholar? (If so please explain why).**

My future career aspiration is to qualify as a solicitor of England and Wales. The programme has not changed this, but the skills gained from being here have helped with enhancing my life and professional experience. Having now spent six weeks on the other side of the world, I am now able to utilise this experience to show my international outlook, which will be useful as law firms generally want solicitors to have a global perspective. Furthermore, the leadership skills I have acquired over the last two years have been invaluable to my professional and personal development.