

My Leadership Development

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It feels odd, in a way, to look back at the person I was two years ago before joining the Laidlaw programme. As much as things have changed, other things have stayed the same. For example, I have the same ambitious nature that first pushed me to apply. However, I now know that I have a better toolkit, stronger motivation, and a clearer path on how to put my ambitions into action and turn my “dreams” into goals. Before applying, I was enticed by the appeal of building a stronger network of other likeminded young people. Now, that network of fellow scholars surrounds me. I share the same interests and ideas with myself from two years’ ago, but I now also have the added confidence and experience to put such ideas into practice.

Before I applied to Laidlaw, I thought of myself as rather reserved by nature and receptive to others’ ideas to the extent of hiding my own. Now, however, through Laidlaw I have absolutely found my voice. I feel more confident to speak up and share my thoughts and ideas. As a personal development goal through the programme, I aimed to become more assertive, and confident in myself. I no longer see those as goals to attain, but rather, attributes I possess. Being pushed out of my comfort zone through the programme showed me that my “comfort zone” can indeed become as large as I am willing to make it. Laidlaw has allowed me to expand my horizons and push the limiting frontiers of what I believed was possible for myself.

Once I was accepted to the Laidlaw programme, I was excited to build a network, to develop my attributes and skills, to gain research skills and to have the chance to go abroad. Prior to our first piece of leadership development, each scholar completed a DiSC profile. This allowed me to have the chance to get to know myself better, and to finetune aspects of my leadership style that I perhaps had not previously considered.

Having an iD DiSC style showed me a lot about myself. I was shown that my style was being goal-oriented, driven by exciting breakthroughs, happy to have my own freedom and keen to maximise my talents. I was told that I was likely to be passionate, expressive, and enthusiastic, enjoying persuading others to big ideas but caring less about the more in-depth responsibilities. I like having multiple projects, and love the excitement of starting something new, although find this momentum more challenging to maintain as the excitement wanes.

I felt that my DiSC profile was, and still is, highly accurate. Having an iD style means that I am goal-oriented, driven by exciting breakthroughs, love making my own course and keen to maximise my personal talents. Accurately, my profile review stated that whilst I am passionate, expressive, and enthusiastic about big ideas, I may take on fewer in-depth responsibilities. It’s certainly true that I am motivated by the big picture, because doing so allows me to remain optimistic and driven. However, through both

my research project and Leadership in Action project, I have come to appreciate the 'nitty gritty' responsibilities that go into being a leader. I now see it as a necessary puzzle piece required for the big picture. Having an iD style allows optimism and vision to naturally drive me, but the Laidlaw Leadership development opportunities taught me the value of also taking on the responsibilities which go into being a leader.

Later in my Laidlaw experience, I was also able to receive my Belbin profile regarding my role within a team. This was equally illuminating as I came to realise that my skillset can best be used at the beginning of projects, coming up with ideas and motivating others. I applied this through workshops with other Laidlaw scholars, taking on the strongest role at the beginning of the project. Similarly, I was able to analyse my weaknesses, such as the note on the Belbin report that I may employ emotion over reasoning. I took extra care to employ reasoning when approaching my Leadership in Action project and ensured to work with others who have a logical approach. Having team members who led with their head complimented my approach of leading with my heart, and formulated a strong, successful balance.

During my first Summer with Laidlaw, I thoroughly enjoyed the Action Learning Sets. Participating in the programme during Covid meant that it wasn't always easy to meet people, and so these short, virtual meetings allowed us to connect with other scholars. Being personable and thriving off the attitudes of others, I loved the camaraderie of sharing in each other's challenges and supporting each other through them, whilst also taking the time to celebrate each other's victories.

I learned many skills in my first Summer as I participated in my own self-led research project. I learned, with the help of my supervisor, how to change ideas into plans, and stick to them. I learned that research progress is not always linear. I learned how to be diligent and manage my time wisely (even when no one was watching). I learned how to motivate myself. Most importantly, and due to the help of other scholars, I learned how to dream a little bigger; I recognised that I was capable of more and more as the project went on, and so my final vision was edited to reflect my big dreams. My research project was initially focussed on analysing two Irish speeches and discussing how useful micro-historical rhetorical studies are for historians. However, I went on to translate this research into a website (a continued work in progress!), which has allowed me to consider a wider range of historical speeches, from a variety of countries and historical periods. I also hope to take my new skills of confidence and assertion and present my historical research in the upcoming year.

The research project taught me a lot about my learning and working style and allowed me to better improve my schedule to fit with what I was learning about myself. These are skills I carried beyond the Laidlaw research project, and into my personal life as a student, a worker, and a volunteer.

When planning my Leadership in Action project for the second Summer, I certainly learned a lesson in crisis management and adaptability; My plans changed several times due to unforeseen circumstances outside of my control. It was a struggle, but a great chance to improve my resilience, and to learn how to maintain optimism even when things do not go to plan. Sometimes the best plan was Plan B all along (or even Plan F or G!).

In my second summer, I worked for organisations in Norway. Using the Leadership skills which I had developed, I shared ideas, collaborated on projects, and worked with individuals in need. I enjoyed participating in mentorship talks with Kristine Meeke Stokke, the leader of the organisation, wherein we discussed aspects and challenges of being a young, female leader.

This Leadership in Action experience not only gave me the opportunity to put my skills into practice, but also to develop new skills, even ones which I didn't expect. I learned acutely how to take care of myself and manage my time. Each day, on top of the assignments from the organisation with whom I worked, I tried to develop a personal goal which I believed would help me to progress further. For example, every Monday I found an opportunity to be creative. One week, this manifested itself into drawing and designing, whilst the next I tried my hand at creative writing. On Tuesdays, I would focus more on my studious endeavours, such as taking extra time to learn a language, or spending an hour reading a novel in the sunshine. The experience offered me a holistic approach to life; one wherein you can enjoy yourself whilst working hard. I navigated a new language, new culture, and new people, and came out of it a stronger, more independent, and more self-assured version of myself.

I feel that throughout the project I have been lucky to learn from others, whether they be other scholars, mentors, those I worked with, those I worked for, or inspiring individuals such as Minouche Shafik and Jamie Peacock in their workshops. Peacock's workshop about turning dreams into goals and goals into actions gave me the confidence and structure to finally start my own small business – one I had been thinking about for a long time. I am so grateful for the opportunities offered by Laidlaw to allow me to develop in ways which I wouldn't have imagined.

In addition to the formal requirements of the Laidlaw programme, I believe something which the scholars inherit is the ability to expand their ambitions further. I mentioned already about how Laidlaw encouraged my research project to grow into an interactive website and workshop series. Additionally, a growth mindset has become an ingrained part of my identity. When I was helping refugees with their CVs as part of my Leadership in Action project in Norway, I discovered that the organisation did not have the facilities to also teach LinkedIn – and so I offered to teach it. I noticed that most frequent communication with refugees and immigrants was held in Spanish, and that the organisation was globally short of Spanish-speaking volunteers; taking this as an indication of how to best help in these humanitarian organisations, I have now signed

up for a Beginner's Spanish class. There is always more that we can do, and Laidlaw taught me that I am able to do it.

Looking forward, I hope to continue achieving as a Laidlaw scholar and as Laidlaw alumni. I intend to see through to the end the plans set in place regarding my research project's outcomes, and to follow that path farther if possible. I would love to continue to participate in workshops, where granted the opportunity to do so, to further increase my learning and maintain an attitude of growth and betterment. I hope to participate in other Laidlaw programmes, such as the Scholars Venture for start-up businesses. Of course, I intend to continue the principles of ethical leadership in my professional and personal life, as I continue to volunteer my time, to share my ideas, and to become the best possible version of myself. Moreover, I will continue to connect with and maintain connections with Laidlaw scholars, both at the University, and further afield. Thanks to the confidence Laidlaw has given me, I know that I can continue to volunteer, to travel, and to be a strong leader.

I notice already that the skills and lessons of Laidlaw play their role in my daily life. I have recently volunteered my time to help a society at the University of St Andrews for people living with a variety of chronic health issues. In my role within the society, I have noticed myself using the lessons of being a facilitator, as I set up connections for new members to ensure their comfort and inclusion. I have noticed the principles of ethical leadership coming into my workplace, as I refrain from gossip or a bad work attitude. I am most grateful for the improvement of my personal development goal: being assertive, independent, and confident enough to share and advocate for my own ideas. Throughout my time in Laidlaw, I worked on this skill through studying abroad, joining societies, and speaking up during class. It's so strange to think that it was something which I consciously worked on, and now I simply consider it something that I am. That said, other goals and priorities are now on my mind and on my 'To Do' List – and I am so excited to work on these thanks to the wonderful Leadership training I have received from the Laidlaw programme.

Finally, I would like to say thank you to everyone on the team at St Andrews for their support through any challenges. Thank you to my fellow scholars for pushing me further in my ambitions. Thank you to the organisations who provided me with wonderful experiences, and especially to Kristine for her expertise and kind words. And, of course, a sincere thank you to Lord Laidlaw and the Laidlaw programme for this wonderful opportunity at Leadership development.