

CRAFT **HER**

 **LAILAW**  
FOUNDATION

**SWARA**  
VOICE OF WOMEN

# Impact Report CraftHER LiA 2025

## Leadership In Action

01 July to  
05 August  
2025



# Table of Contents

03 Acknowledgements	09 Overall Impact
04 Program Overview	10 Looking Back
05 Program Timeline	11 Conclusion
06 At a Glance	12 Next Steps
07 Key Themes	13 Appendix
08 Quantitative Snapshot	

# Acknowledgements

This report, and the journey it represents, would not have been possible without the support and trust of the Laidlaw Foundation. Their belief in ethical leadership, women's empowerment, and global citizenship has made CraftHER 2025 a reality and allowed our scholars to learn, grow, and contribute in profound ways.

We are equally grateful to the craftswomen, communities, and partner organizations in Kerala who opened their homes, shared their knowledge, and welcomed the scholars with such generosity. Their wisdom and collaboration lie at the heart of this program.

To the scholars themselves, thank you for your openness, curiosity, and commitment - you are the living embodiment of the program's purpose.

Finally, a warm thank you to the facilitators, coordinators, and teams behind the scenes who ensured that every detail, from logistics to learning, was cared for. This was truly a collective effort, and together we built something meaningful that will continue to ripple outward.



# Program Overview



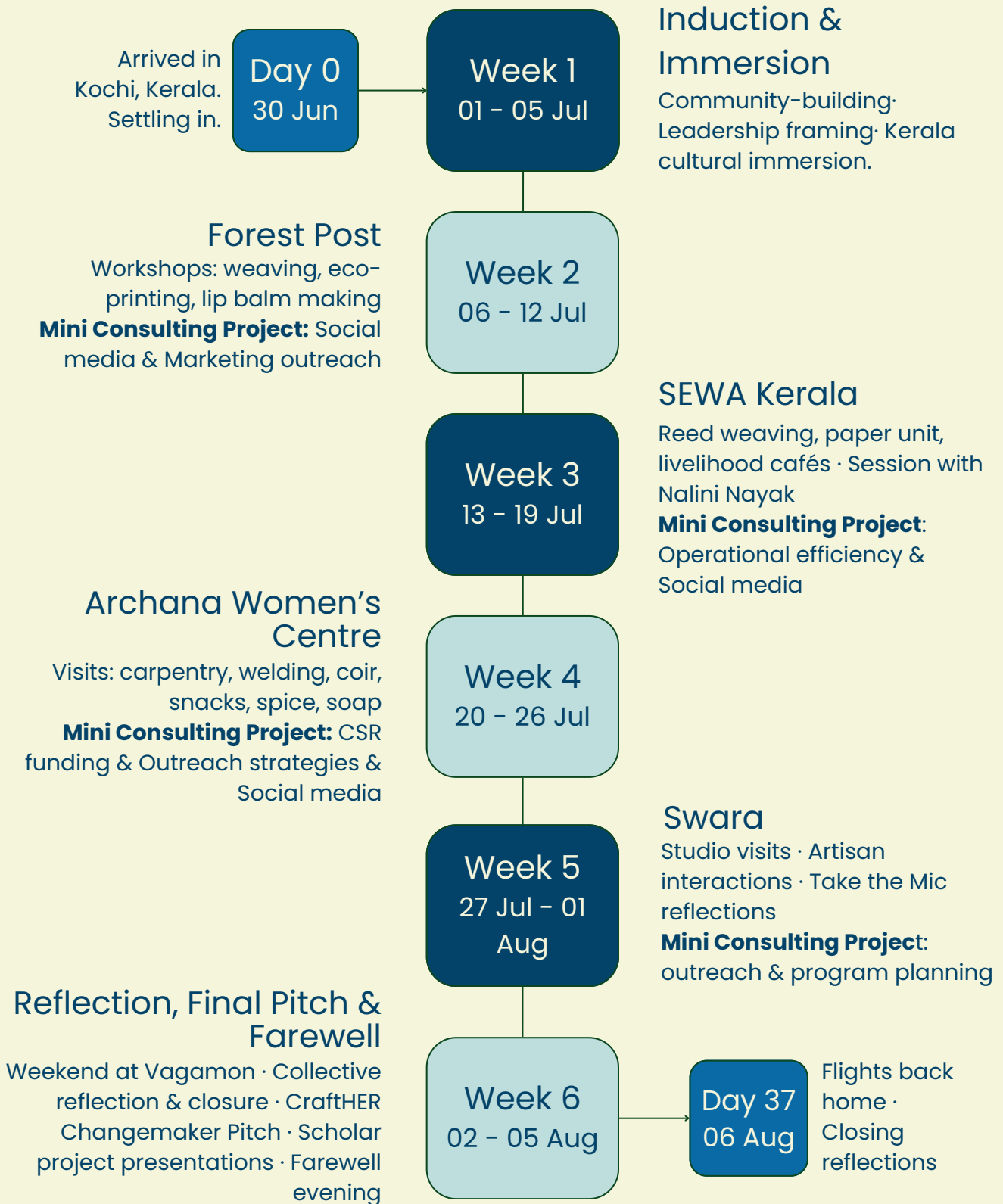
CraftHER is an immersive ethical leadership program spanning 6 weeks, exclusively for Laidlaw Foundation Scholars.

Anchored in Kerala, India and hosted by Swara, the program blends grassroots immersion, cultural exchange, consulting projects, and reflective leadership practice.

In 2025, five scholars from across the world participated in CraftHER. They worked closely with four grassroots partner organisations - ForestPost, SEWA Kerala, Archana Women's Centre and Swara - while also pursuing personal entrepreneurial projects and collective consulting challenges. The program was designed to deepen their understanding of ethical leadership, women's empowerment, and community-centered entrepreneurship while creating positive social impact.

This program is made possible through the support of the Laidlaw Foundation, whose commitment to global leadership development empowers young scholars to engage deeply with grassroots communities, grow as ethical leaders, and contribute to lasting social change in the places where they work.

# Program Timeline



# At a Glance

5 Scholars engaged

6 Weeks of Immersion

4 Organisation Partners

20+ Knowledge Transfer Workshop

100+ Hours of on-ground Engagement

60+ Community Members Interacted

4 Mini consulting Projects delivered

4 Personal Entrepreneurial Projects pitched

14 TED-style talks given

# Key Themes - 7

The following seven themes emerged from a qualitative analysis of Scholar reflections including Interviews and the Take the Mic sessions conducted during the program. Together, they capture recurring ideas, values, and learnings that shaped the cohort's experience, highlighting not just what scholars encountered, but what they carried forward.

# 1

## Generosity & Hospitality

Repeated across almost every reflection. Craftswomen, families, communities, and even strangers welcoming scholars into homes, workplaces, and cultural spaces. Generosity framed as time, space, knowledge, and experience offered freely.



# 2

## Community & Solidarity

Scholars emphasized the power of collective resilience, both within their own cohort and in the craftswomen's clusters. Themes of patience, mutual care, and shared responsibility stood out. The idea that "burdens are lighter when carried together" was repeatedly observed and embraced.



# 3

## Presence & Mindfulness

Multiple scholars spoke about being present in the moment, overcoming fear/anxiety, and learning to slow down. Yoga, reflection sessions, and unexpected cohort moments like running into the rain highlighted this shift.



# 4

## Feminism Reimagined



Several scholars challenged individualistic or “girlboss” notions of feminism they had encountered back home. Instead, they discovered new models of collective empowerment rooted in care, collaboration, and everyday practices of survival and joy. For some, this was the first encounter with feminism grounded in local and indigenous contexts, rather than Western academic frameworks.

# 5

## Consumption, Sustainability & Value of Craft:



Consistent critique of overconsumption, fast fashion, and disposability. Deep appreciation for craft as slow, sustainable, intergenerational, and personal. Scholars linked artisanship to resistance against exploitative global systems.

# 6

## Personal Transformation & Leadership



Scholars consistently reflected on their inner growth: confidence, openness, letting go of fear, finding their voice. Leadership was reframed as listening, being attentive, and supporting others, not just ambition or achievement.

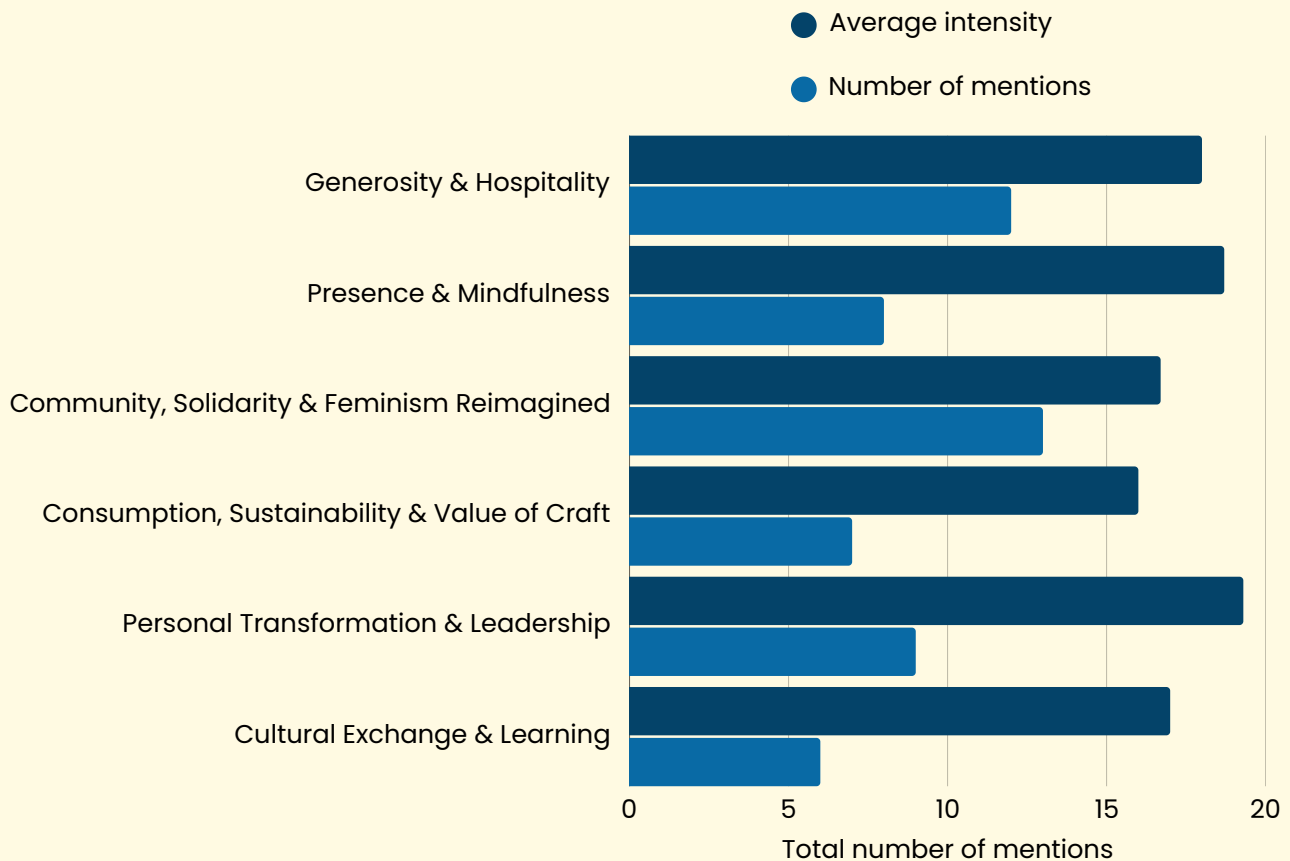
# 7

## Cultural Exchange & Learning



A constant thread. Being immersed in a culture different from their own, making mistakes and being taught gently, embracing difference without fear. Learning to “see the world differently” through local perspectives

# Quantitative Snapshot



The chart above illustrates both the frequency and the intensity of key themes that emerged from scholar reflections.

Frequency is shown as the number of times a theme was mentioned across interviews and Take the Mic sessions. Intensity reflects the depth of engagement, originally coded on a 3-point scale and rescaled here to a 20-point scale for clarity:

- 1 = Light Mention → passing reference, one or two sentences, no elaboration ( $\approx 7/20$ ).
- 2 = Moderate Engagement → developed point with some detail, reflection, or a single example ( $\approx 13/20$ ).
- 3 = Strong Engagement → extended reflection, storytelling, emotional or critical analysis ( $\approx 20/20$ ).

This dual representation highlights not only which themes were most frequently mentioned but also the depth with which scholars engaged with them.

# Overall Impact



The program cultivated a form of leadership rooted in attentiveness, care, and the ability to listen deeply across cultures.

Beyond numbers and activities, the program's true impact was visible in the transformation of the Scholars themselves and the impact their interactions have had on the organisation. Over the course of the immersion, they moved from initial nervous anticipation to a confident embrace of new ways of seeing, leading, and belonging. The program cultivated a form of leadership rooted not in ambition or achievement alone, but in attentiveness, care, and the ability to listen deeply across cultures.

At its heart, the program advanced women's empowerment – not just by observing it, but by participating in and learning from systems where women support one another as leaders, mothers, artisans, and community builders.

Finally, the experience deepened a sense of global citizenship. Immersion in India's cultural and social landscapes allowed Scholars to challenge assumptions, embrace difference, and see interconnectedness more clearly. They return not only with insights into sustainability and craft, but also with an expanded vision of their role in shaping a more inclusive and responsible world.

# Looking Back

Reflection is central to CraftHER's spirit of learning. We acknowledge what worked especially well in shaping meaningful experiences for scholars and partners, while also identifying areas that call for refinement. Both have shaped our understanding, giving us clarity on how to grow and deepen the programme in years to come.

## What Worked Well

- **Strong engagement:** Students actively participated and showed consistent growth across the weeks.
- **Leadership and cultural exchange:** The program gave students a chance to step up as leaders while learning from grassroots communities and leaders.
- **Immersive learning:** The hands-on, real-world approach made the experience memorable and meaningful.
- **Clear communication:** Daily updates and structured activities ensured the program stayed on track.

## Areas to Improve

- **Measuring Impact:** Stronger tools and methods are needed to capture and demonstrate the positive change created for partner organisations in a clear, measurable way.
- **Technology & Logistics:** Glitches with connectivity, space, and materials highlight the need for smoother systems and backups.
- **Resource Readiness:** Sharing materials and references earlier would make learning more effective.
- **Balancing Time, Energy & Intensity:** While the programme's richness was a strength, the fast pace sometimes felt demanding; adding pauses, reflection time, or lighter breaks could help sustain energy and focus.



# Conclusion

CraftHER's 2025 program reaffirmed its alignment with the Laidlaw Foundation's values of ethical leadership, women's empowerment, and global citizenship. By immersing Scholars in craft-based ecosystems of care, collaboration, and sustainability, CraftHER 2025 demonstrated how leadership can be redefined through attentiveness, solidarity, and cultural exchange reaffirming its alignment with the values of ethical leadership, women's empowerment, and global citizenship.

Looking ahead, CraftHER is committed to scaling its reach, deepening partnerships with grassroots practitioners, and creating pathways for alumni to continue their journey as changemakers. The goal is to expand the circle of impact, ensuring that more women leaders and communities worldwide benefit from this unique model of leadership in action.



# Next Steps



CraftHER will continue to grow in alignment with Laidlaw's vision of ethical leadership, women's empowerment, and global citizenship.

- **Deepen Partnerships:** Strengthen collaborations with grassroots women's organizations to ensure locally grounded, sustainable impact.
- **Equip Scholars:** Enhance pre-departure preparation and leadership training rooted in the 3Cs.
- **Extend Impact:** Build alumni pathways and knowledge-sharing platforms to carry lessons and partnerships forward.
- **Sustainability & SMART Goals:** Maintain strong emphasis on Scholars setting SMART goals and ensuring their contributions create long-term, sustainable value.

# Appendix

## I. Program Schedule Summary

The six-week program combined immersive field visits, skill-building sessions, and reflective spaces. The schedule balanced structured learning with hands-on engagement, offering scholars a holistic journey through craft, culture, and leadership. Here's the program schedule summary, capturing key moments week by week.



## II. Interview Questions used

### ROUND 1

1. What brought you to this program?
2. What are you hoping to discover or learn?
3. What's your first impression of the place/people?
4. How do you feel stepping into this experience?
5. One word to describe your mindset right now?

### ROUND 2

1. What has been the most surprising part of the journey so far?
2. How have your ideas or expectations changed since the beginning?
3. What's something you now see differently than when you started?
4. Describe your experience with the two organisations in one sentence each.
5. What have these experiences revealed about the world of work?
6. What have you learned by observing others?
7. Is there a challenge that you're proud of navigating?
8. One thing you want to do differently in the second half?
9. How has your relationship with the group changed?
10. If this journey was a season, which one would it be?

### Extra questions

1. Which interaction or moment changed something for you?
2. What are you learning about yourself?
3. A skill or quality you've started valuing more now?
4. What keeps you curious or engaged right now?
5. What's one intention you're carrying forward?
6. If you could draw a graph of your energy or emotions so far, how would it look?
7. How would you describe this experience now, in one word?

## II. Interview Questions used

### ROUND 3

1. What does CraftHER mean to you?
2. What moment from the past few weeks will stay with you the longest? Why?
3. How have you changed as a person since the beginning of this journey?
4. What's a skill or mindset you're taking back with you that you didn't have before?
5. Was there a story or person from the community you worked with that deeply moved you- something you haven't shared before?
6. What did this experience teach you about collaboration or working with others?
7. How did you bring your own background, identity, or values into your final project?
8. What was the most challenging part of the journey, (other than language barrier) and how did you overcome it?
9. What's something surprising you learnt about yourself during CraftHER?
10. If you had to describe this journey in 3 words, what would they be? Why?
11. What advice would you give to a future CraftHER scholar?
12. How has this experience shaped what you want to do next in life?
13. What would you say to someone who's never heard of CraftHER?
14. If CraftHER had a soundtrack, what would one song on it be?
15. How do you think programs like this can create change in the world?

### III. Take the Mic event brief

Hi everyone.

This Friday night, 25 July, from 8:15 PM to 10:00 PM, we'll come together for the first of three special evenings called Take the Mic, a space for each of you to stand up and speak your truth.

This is Part 1 of the series, with Part 2 on 1 August and the final round on 5 August, your last evening with us.

What is Take the Mic?

Each of you will have 10 minutes (you can take longer if you'd like) to deliver a TED-style talk reflecting on your experience so far at CraftHER.

How to prepare:

1. Choose a compelling title
2. Write and practice your talk
3. Share something real. A moment of leadership, something Kerala taught you, or a woman who deeply impacted you

Why this matters:

This is leadership in action.

Great leaders move people, not with slides, but with stories.

Not with jargon, but with truth. With lived experiences.

The ability to speak from the heart – with presence, power, and perspective – is one of the most important leadership skills you can build. Take the Mic is your space to do just that.

Dress Code:

Let's treat this evening like a celebration of voice and presence.

Dress code: "Date-night meets TED Talk."

In other words – dress up! Look good. Feel confident. Show up for yourself.

Special Guests Joining Us:

We're excited to have Lakshmi and Harnoor join us for the evening.

- Lakshmi has been a core part of designing several of the workshops you've taken part in during CraftHER. And important rituals of the program like morning and evening huddles.
- Harnoor has been working closely with me on strategic projects at Swara.

They're looking forward to hearing your voices.

Prep Tip: How will you know you're doing a good job?

Ask yourself:

Would I be moved if I was listening to this talk from the audience?

Here's how to practice:

- Record yourself and watch it back. It's awkward, but it works.
- Practice in front of a mirror. Focus on clarity and emotion.
- Run your talk for a friend or co-scholar and get feedback.
- Time yourself. You must speak for at least 10 minutes.
- Focus on storytelling, not perfection.

## IV. List of Core Partners

### FOREST POST

Forest Post is a grassroots collective that collaborates with rural and forest-based communities to build sustainable livelihoods while preserving traditional knowledge and crafts with a community-first approach.

 [Forest Post](#)

 [forestpost](#)

### SEWA

SEWA Kerala, or the Self Employed Women's Association in Kerala, is a member-based organization that aims to empower women in the informal sector. SEWA Kerala is a federation of various member-based organizations.

 [SEWA](#)

 [SEWA Kerala](#)

### AWC

Archana Women's Centre (AWC) empowers women through small collectives that foster economic selfreliance, social equality, and gender justice by providing the skills and solidarity to transform their lives and communities.

 [AWC](#)

 [archanajjpt](#)

### SWARA

SWARA is a women-led e-commerce platform for contemporary apparel that blends modern design with traditional fabric printing and dyeing. By partnering with skilled women in Dungarpur, Rajasthan, SWARA creates sustainable fashion that values dignity, care, and community while making slow fashion accessible to a wider audience.

 [Swara](#)

 [swaravow](#)