

*Leadership in Action Project Report*

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During my time with the organization make\_sense in Mexico City, I worked with a civil society organization called Inspira Cambio, a group which provides healthcare services including sexual health for people in the LGBTQ+ community, people who use needles/inject drugs, and people who have HIV. Our project focused on planning and organizing a Noche de Deteccion for Inspira Cambio. Noche de Deteccion is a monthly event executed by Inspira, where they allow their service users access to discounted STI tests and counselling, and the ability to make appointments outside of regular working hours. The Noche de Deteccion helps both service users and gives Inspira a platform on which to promote their healthcare. For the Noche de Deteccion, my team planned various events, including tote bag painting, an embroidery workshop, an informative talk, and a DJ. Moreover, we interviewed service users and Inspira workers to create a testimonial video celebrating the ten-year anniversary of Inspira. Our work with Inspira allowed us insight into the way in which people belonging to minority communities access healthcare services. I felt proud and grateful that I was able to contribute even a small role in helping to provide sexual health services and counselling to marginalized communities in Mexico City.

Within my project, I contributed specifically on creating the testimonial video, and helping to plan the Noche de Deteccion. I worked with a group of two other women as we collaborated in all aspects of our Inspira project. In relation to the project, I defined a SMART goal as: working collaboratively with my partner, listening to the needs of the community, being a respectful and kind leader. Although we were all “leaders” of our project, I think we all took control of different aspects in order to have our work come together seamlessly. In my case, I began by creating the timeline of our project, and the outline for the day of the event. Once created, I took my ideas back to my team to hear their input. When we had decided on a firm

plan for our timeline and Day of, we presented our ideas to Inspira. One of the ways I worked with my team and listened to the community was through this back and forth on the timeline. I made sure to hear what my teammates had to say regarding my ideas about the timeline, integrating their thoughts about the project in with my own. Furthermore, when we took these ideas to Inspira, they gave us some of their input on what they thought would and would not work based on their past events. In response, we had to rework some of our original plan, to best respond to the needs of the community at the time. As we continued to move through the project, I was delegated most of the work of editing the testimonial video together. I became the “leader” of the editing part of the video, which meant that I wanted to be a kind and respectful leader in this area of the project. I strived to make sure that the opinions of my teammates were included in the editing of the video. We worked together to come up with the narrative of the video, and what parts of each testimony we would use so that we could all contribute our own ideas. I think that I was ultimately successful in this goal, as the video turned out well with a very positive response from Inspira. Moreover, throughout the video, my teammates and I were all able to see our own contributions and the balance of multiple ideas.

One of my SMART goals involved seeing a meaningful impact on the group I was working with. Although this originally seemed like it may be difficult to achieve, it turns out that we were able to see our impact immediately. After the Noche de Deteccion event and the make\_sense impact fair the subsequent day, we learned that we had raised around \$7000 MX for Inspira Cambio. When we first met with Inspira, they told us that the Mexican government had repealed funding for their organization, and that members of the LGBT community are refused access to healthcare due to their sexual identities. Inspira is particularly important because it provides services to marginalized communities who may not have access to them otherwise.

However, with the loss of funding for the organization, many of their service users must pay for their healthcare out of pocket if it is not covered by their insurance. Inspira told us that while they try to subsidize some testing for users, they do not have the funds to cover everything, as well as pay their employees who are doing such valuable work. Thus, raising the money for Inspira was an immediate impact of which we are very proud. Inspira was very happy with the turnout of the Noche de Deteccion, and with the money we raised. It is our hope that these funds will let Inspira continue to provide healthcare to marginalized communities.

In addition to my goal of seeing a lasting impact, one of my other SMART goals involved learning about a new community and their perspectives. Through working with Inspira, I learned about the challenges facing Mexicans who are in the LGBTQ+ community. As aforementioned, the community does not always have equal and ensured access to healthcare, as doctors can legally deny services to a patient for being LGBTQ+. Our touchpoints with Inspira, two people named Mali and Sagrario, discussed with us the ways in which this negatively affects the lives of Mexicans. They mentioned that many of the cases they see at Inspira are people denied sexual and reproductive healthcare, or others who are struggling with managing HIV and AIDS because they are unable to access preventative or post-exposure medication. I was surprised upon finding out the restrictions imposed on the lives of people in the community, and hearing the stories told by the workers at Inspira forced me to acknowledge my privilege. Coming from my home in Canada, where healthcare is free and relatively accessible, issues with equality in healthcare seem so far away, a quandary that I think about at times but have never encountered in my own life. However, in working with Inspira, I came face-to-face with people who were fighting to provide healthcare to minority groups, and people who were negatively affected by inaccessibility. I genuinely believe that my experience with Inspira will continue to make me

check my privilege and the way I operate in the world. I want to become more aware of ways that healthcare may be inaccessible in my home country and try to become involved with initiatives similar to Inspira in my community. Through this project, I would say that I definitively achieved my goal of being immersed in a new perspective. I am deeply grateful that I had the opportunity to work with Inspira and witness the incredible services they are providing to people in need.

My experience in Mexico City was a deeply rewarding one. Within the guidelines of the LiA, I was able to achieve my SMART goals and gain new perspectives as I worked with a marginalized community. Outside of these guidelines, I had a six-week opportunity to meet interesting and amazing new people, visit an enriching, beautiful city, and was afforded a new view on the world and the way I comport myself within it. I will always remember my time in Mexico City, the people I met there, and everything I learned along the way. Before I end my experience, I want to thank the Laidlaw Scholars Foundation for this incredible opportunity and what I have gained as a Laidlaw Scholar. Thank you to make\_sense Americas for executing this project and supporting us as scholars. Thank you to Inspira Cambio for allowing us to contribute even a small amount to the amazing work you do. Finally, thank you to the University of Toronto Laidlaw Scholars Program for your ongoing support, commitment, and kindness as I have embarked on this scholarship for the past year.