

# Laidlaw Scholarship Reflective Report

## Scholar

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Title of Scholarship Project:	Improving Opportunities for Young People's Active Travel: Online Engagement to Impact Travel

### **Please describe the research you have conducted this period**

The research project I undertook endeavoured to create a piece of participatory action research with young people as 'peer-researchers' to identify the barriers to active travel and identify solutions to these. However, due to unforeseen and unexpected problems regarding time and recruitment, our research project shifted to instead prioritise collecting the data (to be able to review and creatively present it to shareholders) by conducting focus groups with a range of young people. To do this, we delivered a three-day crash course with a group of older young people in Kentmere Community Centre who led the conversation regarding their perspective on active travel to extracurricular activities.

I had to do both primary and secondary research in that I had to speak to various young people about their experiences as well as research and read about how to include young people in research and the value of this. We helped deliver various focus group sessions with different groups of young people from different youth centres. This enabled us to begin the process of identifying the key barriers preventing them to engage in more active travel. A thematic analysis was then conducted on the data we collected which we used as a starting point for discussions we had later in the project.

Initially, I also had to research how best to disseminate research to young people and ways to disseminate research findings and how this can be interpreted in a more digestible manner for the 'peer researchers.' From this, I had to prepare a presentation about disseminating research findings to young people using both traditional (i.e., research reports) and more contemporary methods (i.e., through social media).

However, our original plan of training young people to be 'peer researchers' did not follow through; we instead had to help with the delivery of the three-day crash course wherein we found the barriers to active travel through the lens of the young people from Kentmere. We made the sessions interactive to allow the young people to be engaged in the research. We did a walk around the area as well as a virtual one, with the aid of google maps, to allow the young people to take us to locations they would

not normally take and why. The discussions that we had allowed us to sort the barriers into categories. From this, we asked them to propose solutions to the identified barriers, inquiring them to map together the solutions per the group of people who could enact these on a grid.

Thus, my research was mainly to do with the process of conducting research with young people and the various methods to do so, encountering different activities to do with the young people to supplement the research. I worked with my fellow Laidlaw scholar, Rebecca, which made the project a little bit more manageable since we had each other to divide the work. We were tasked with documenting the process and creating content, such as infographics and short video reels, to be shared at a later date.

### **How is the research work you have been undertaking impactful or important?**

The research I have conducted has been impactful to me in that it has taught me the significance that active travel can do not just for the environment, but also for our physical, mental, and maybe even our financial health. It has made me more conscious of the mode of transport I use to get to places.

The reason I joined the project was because of the environmental aspect of it, which is completely different to my field of study, but a subject that I am passionate about. Environmental issues that have arisen over time highlight the urgency that having awareness of such issues is no longer enough. Instead, action must be taken. Nonetheless, the project has introduced the concept of climate change and global warming to some young people, which I think is an important step in making more people aware of the problems so that they can be more conscious of them and hopefully take steps to minimise fuelling the problem. This further reinforces the need for an increase in active travel among young children to be made a priority as young people are the ones who will be affected the most by these pressing environmental issues.

However, the young people we conducted our research with also reminded me of the importance of being heard. Most of the young people agreed that had there been a clear two-way conversation between them and those in positions of power, like Leeds City Council, then there may be fewer problems and hindrances between them and active travel, and potentially around their neighbourhoods as well. For example, they claimed that they would be more likely to walk or cycle to places around their neighbourhood if there were places they could go to or things they could do. Even more so, they said that they would be willing to travel further on foot or bike to town, for example, if the activities there weren't so expensive. The big money problem was still prevalent in these young people, preventing them from buying a bike or travelling to places where they could do more things which could prevent them from crowding in little children's parks and intimidating them. This has made me realise the prevalent hardships people continue to face with money, particularly in the smaller neighbourhoods outside of the city centre. It was touching to hear some of the young people's stories about having to cycle to their school regardless of the weather because the bus fare was too expensive. It has made me more appreciative and aware of my position of being able to uber to places if it was raining instead of walking there.

The research I have conducted has proved its importance seeing that only a small number of young people used active travel, even though most said that they would be willing to if the solutions they proposed were enacted. This included being given a financial incentive to use active travel, like getting a discounted cinema ticket for having cycled to the cinema.

Moreover, I think that the research I have undertaken has highlighted the potential of active travel becoming the norm for young people should they be made more aware of the why behind it as well as the benefits in it for them. This message could be made more powerful provided that the research findings get disseminated on social media platforms that young people would be more likely to have access to as opposed to research articles.

I know that this research project can potentially pave the way to include young people more in discussions regarding matters concerning them, to fully understand the root of their problems and to be able to hear their experiences. Also, I know that it is a start to help put together a plan of action to promote active travel and to achieve Leeds City Council's goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2030.

### **What impact has conducting research had on your degree course and university experience?**

My research project has a limited correlation to my law degree. Notwithstanding, I gained more practical, real-life experience that could help me with my degree, and set me apart from others when applying for jobs.

Being a Laidlaw scholar conducting my research has made me approach the project differently. This time around, I was more aware of trying to be a leader during the process. I attempted to be more conscientious of the choices and decisions I make to be similar to that of a leader, as well as of the leadership skills that I have, such as being able to manage my time and work independently, and those that I need to work on, including trusting those in my team and delegating work to them.

Working under a more experienced leader has taught me different types of leadership styles which I could adopt in the future, as well as how to effectively manage a team and delegate tasks appropriately. Pursuing a law degree means that I will work with a team; this will prove useful to me in the future.

Having conducted my research in an interdisciplinary team has taught me how to work with people with different skill sets and levels of seniority, teaching me the importance of being adaptable and flexible. This is important in my degree as I partake in volunteering activities, in which I will have to work with a variety of people – namely the Welfare Appeals Tribunal Clinic. Moreover, I will need to participate in group presentations or projects, in which I can hone in on my experience with working with a range of people and skill sets.

The meetings we had throughout the project also taught me how to collaborate with those in your team. Even though at first, I was quite reserved for I feared stepping out of the ambit of my role, I eventually gained the confidence to put forward my

thoughts and insert my contributions to the discussions. This confidence will be useful for my degree as Law is very competitive, requiring me to debate with others and continually challenge both theirs and my perspectives, which I will hopefully be able to participate more in as I have learnt the value of listening to alternative opinions.

Conducting research has also taught me that it is normal for research to not be linear. This is very reassuring in that it has proved to me that it is more important to have backup plans and to be able to think quickly on your feet for even an incredibly solid plan could inevitably fall through. This gives me more confidence to answer questions in my seminars because I have a lesser fear of failure. Instead, my perspective has shifted to seeing the wrong answers I get as motivation instead to get them correct the next time.

In terms of my university experience, my research has helped me interact with other departments, namely the School of Education which was a refreshing change. I am usually stuck in my Law bubble; getting to know different parts of the university shows me the diversity and wealth of knowledge around the different departments. It was interesting to also interact with staff from different parts of the university – each bringing their own skill sets and flavour to the project which made it more rounded. Connecting with a range of staff from the university has also helped to expand my network.

**What leadership skills do you believe you have gained from the research period? (please refer to the leadership attributes below)**

I have gained several leadership skills following my period of research. Even though the research project had solid footing with logical plans to back it up, the role I ended up taking differed significantly from the one I had originally stepped foot, teaching me how to be able to navigate new and foreign situations. It has taught me how research is always changing. I learned that research does not have to be a perfect experience for me to get something out of it. Notwithstanding the obstacles we faced, it gave me a taste of real-life challenges, including recruitment difficulties and time constraints to deliver concrete results to the funders despite being unsure of what direction to take the project in.

Research is a chaotic and messy experience, and it demanded a high level of flexibility and adaptability for me to be able to keep up with its ever-changing nature. Hence, I was continually learning throughout the process because research is a new concept to me. Through this, I had to persevere to be a leader and show essential skills, such as being able to turn ideas into reality, learning to listen to instructions and being proactive and working independently. Even though I was placed lower down in the hierarchy, I showed an ability to manage the hierarchy by leading despite not having authority in that I was able to communicate with my supervisor what I wanted to do and how I wanted to go about his instructions without overstepping my boundaries. My aim in doing this was to secure clarity in my work and to ensure that I was heading in the right direction by not listening to respond, but rather to understand. It has taught me to lead from a position of less power in a hierarchy. I was taught that it is an act of leadership to lead the leader to guide you where you need to be to reach your end goal.

Working alongside an interdisciplinary team has exposed me to working collaboratively with different people with different yet complementary skill sets, as well as different levels of seniority. This helped me understand how different skill sets can come together in a valuable manner, allowing me to develop leadership skills that will allow me to adapt to different people's working styles or to recruit people with skills that complement each other. From this, I identified how I can easily shy away and stay silent when in conversation with my seniors. However, I am working on learning how and when to share my ideas and thoughts without overstepping my boundaries as what I have to say may contribute to the betterment of the project, allowing me to better collaborate with the team and build a better working relationship with them. This experience has proved to me that I am confident in working independently, prioritising my time, making sure I met my deadlines and also being able to listen with understanding. I made sure to continually ask for feedback and guidance when I am unsure from my supervisor to ensure that I am on task.

The nature of the research I conducted being to do young people has also trained me how to work with a variety of young people from different backgrounds, cultures, and age groups. From this, I learnt the significance of capitalising on the power of diversity as I realised the value in retrieving information from a variety of different people leading to a wide variety of results that can potentially be a closer representation of the wider community. This has also helped me strengthen my network, as well as build new relationships.

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

Originally, our task was to disseminate the research findings of the project on social media. However, our project was heavily delayed due to problems with recruitment. Thus, our project shifted directions and we were instead tasked with capturing and making content to be disseminated to the funders and potentially on social media or other means of more traditional methods, such as in a published research report.

I created several infographics and posters that can be distributed both online or in person which include the barriers and solutions that arose from our research. Also, I documented the process of retrieving this data, encapsulating it in the form of reels for the three-day crash course in Kentmere. I posted these reels on the Laidlaw Scholars Network to showcase the research process that I participated in. I am also working on uploading some of the infographics I have created to showcase some of the research we have been gathering. I have also produced a research poster to disseminate my research, as well as a research reflective report, which will also be published on the network.

I also made a preliminary toolkit describing methods to disseminate research findings to young people, as well as the final toolkit that was part of our commitments to the funders. The toolkit acts as a map to be able to reproduce the research method we used to allow other people to do the same for either the same research project or that of something else.

**What are your future career or educational plans?**

I aspire to be a corporate solicitor. I have always been interested in Law because of its rich history and the certainty around it. Having Law reassures me that we at least have on paper some rules to keep order in society, though how these are being followed or looped around can sometimes be questionable. Also, the idea of putting forward your thoughts and ensuring that you are being heard and understood has always appealed to me.

I have always wanted to help people and I think that a career in Law could enable me to help people in the future. I have volunteered for the Welfare and Tribunals Appeal Clinic, and it has solidified my desire to do pro bono and volunteer work in the future because above everything, I just want to be able to help. Upon reaching a stable financial position that will allow me to take on pro bono cases, this is a path that I would want to venture in.

Initially, I was keen on following the criminal route and becoming a criminal solicitor; I have realised that criminal law is too heavy and sensitive for me. Being a more volatile person, I don't think that it would be an ideal situation for me to be involved in sensitive cases as I often absorb other people's emotions and intertwine them with mine.

Also, even though I am confident with public speaking and performing, the idea of becoming a barrister has never appealed to me because, honestly speaking, I would crumble in intense situations such as litigation and court proceedings. Following the path of a solicitor seems more approachable and more realistic, accounting for how I am as a person and what my strengths and weaknesses are. However, I have only finished one year of my degree so my opinions may change.

I have always enjoyed the subject of business so being able to incorporate aspects of that with the law is a middle ground in which I hope I will thrive. Although I know I want to enter a very competitive field, I am putting my whole heart into pursuing this goal of mine; I know that even if I do get knocked down, I will inevitably stand back up.

## Supervisor

*Please comment on your scholar's research period, what you consider to be your scholars' strengths and which leadership attributes (please refer to the leadership attributes below) you feel your scholar has demonstrated and is particularly skilled in. You could also identify areas which your scholar can develop further.*


Maria has demonstrated strong communication skills, proactively sought direction while also working independently, and has approached every task with due diligence.

The project was based on the assumption young people have a right to participate in decisions that affect them, through being invited to offer their perspectives in a way that values their voice. Maria embodied this through listening to young people, asking pertinent questions, genuinely seeking to understand their cultures, and respecting a diverse group of participants.

She, with Rebecca, took the lead on researching and reporting on how to best communicate with young people, particularly how to disseminate findings, and has produced a set of templates and resources that are usable after the end of their time with us, so we can present our findings to young people. She also produced a range of social-media friendly resources ready to disseminate the process we used in consulting with young people when the project comes to an end, in October. This demonstrated an ability to listen, encapsulate, and reflect young people's perspectives on active travel.

Maria had to be self-directed on this project. We provided a set of aims, however we did not have the knowledge or expertise around social media dissemination of research to offer structured guidance. Rather, Maria (and Rebecca) had to engage in their own research and learning. She did this admirably, and showed a significant aptitude for independent study. Maria communicated this learning in aural and written forms, through providing interim toolkits and presentations, and did so expertly.

Signature of Scholar



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Date: 07/09/2022

Signature of Project Leader



Date: 21/9/2022

## Leadership Attributes

Able to lead without authority

Able to convey purpose and build coalitions

Cultural intelligence and capacity for empathy

Honestly assess own knowledge/leadership style/preferences

Knows own limitations and acts accordingly

Learns continually

Speaks and writes clearly and confidently

Able to listen with understanding

Uses digital connectivity

Makes effective decisions in complex environments

Seeks out and fosters innovation and creativity

Strong intellectual ability

Turns ideas into action

Builds relationships and networks

Works collaboratively and across boundaries

Uses emotional intelligence to achieve this

Capitalises on the power of diversity

Able to navigate new and foreign situations

Uses this to build relationships and networks

Has energy and impact

Makes things happen

Able to analyse data and interpret results

Able to work and think independently

Prioritises activities and manages own time