

## **Laidlaw Programme Leadership in Action (LIA) Reflection**

A reflective report is required after each summer period (by 20<sup>th</sup> September). Once submitted we will ask you to post onto the Laidlaw Network (without your project leader comments if you wish).

This should be supplied as a Word document. Interesting photographs directly related to your LIA project or scholarship are encouraged and should be inserted into the body of the word document, not supplied separately.

You are expected to write a detailed and thorough report; which should be around ca 2000-3000 words. You should include all of the following points but it is not limited to these

- **the project/placement you have conducted during this period.**
- **how has the project you have been undertaking been impactful or important?**
- **what impact has the LIA project had on you? Have you achieved the SMART goals as set out at the beginning of the project? (please give examples of how these SMART goals have been achieved)**
- **what leadership skills do you believe you have gained/demonstrated during the LIA period? (please refer to the leadership attributes below)**
- **what 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**
- **what are your future career or educational plans? Have these changed during your time as a scholar? (If so please explain why).**

Please note: This is NOT a technical research report. Scientific reports with a covering note cannot be accepted.

This report will need comments from your supervisor/placement manager and is to be signed off by both you and your supervisor/placement manager before submission.

If you have any problems or queries please contact the Laidlaw Programme Team, [ugresearch@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:ugresearch@leeds.ac.uk)

## Scholar

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Title of LIA Project:	Raising awareness of refugee life in Athens via social media

### Introduction

My LIA project took place at the Saffron Kitchen Project (SKP) in Athens, a community kitchen which aims to feed Athens' most vulnerable people (both refugees and Greeks) with nutritious, flavourful food; offer training to help vulnerable people gain skills, a job and income; and employment to the refugee community.

As a volunteer primarily leading SKP's social media and media strategy – though I also helped out in the kitchen when needed! - my overarching goal during my six weeks at SKP was to increase the media and public profile of Saffron Kitchen Project - and refugee life in Greece as a whole - in order to increase donations and therefore support for refugees in Athens. I also hoped that higher media and public interest in the issue should create conversations, change and political pressure in support of refugees.

### Objectives

Before I left for Athens, I set five objectives to achieve by the end of my time at SKP. They are displayed in the following:

Objectives	Indicators
Establishing a regular social media programme, schedule and presence for Saffron Kitchen Project on Facebook and Instagram	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Posting at least three times a week by the final week of volunteering</li><li>2. Building up a bank of ready-made social media content (pre-written posts, videos and pictures) to be used after I departed</li></ol>
Attracting local and international media interest through social media and press releases - particularly in English- and German-speaking countries via my language skills.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Obtaining expressions of interest from at least one international and one local media outlet by the end of the volunteering period</li></ol>
Creating short cooking/kitchen tips videos to spread the word of SKP's work and also tell the stories of refugees cooking.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Creating five short cooking/kitchen tips videos by the end of the volunteering period</li></ol>
Contacting celebrity chefs to participate at SKP or boost awareness of the charity and its work	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Obtaining expressions of interest from at least one celebrity chef by the end of the volunteering period</li></ol>
Create a weekly Saffron Kitchen Project newsletter/blog combining recipes with the stories of those who create/inherit them.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Publish at least one blog post/newsletter by the end of my time at SKP</li></ol>

I also devised the following week-by-week milestones to measure my progress:

Aa Week	Start date	Milestones	Details
1		Get to know key figures at the charity and draw up social media/media action plan	Decide on frequency/content of regular posts and which social media channels to focus on. Agree set goals with the leadership of the charity - who we want to target in media and social media, particular outlets/celebrity chefs to target etc.
2		Begin regular posting and drafting up press releases	Target press releases to desired outlets Schedule social media posts and create a bank of photos/videos/content that we can use for the future
3		Send out press releases and engage media outlets - set up interviews or see what they're interested in Continue regular posting Brainstorm ideas for recipe videos and blogs	Using a spreadsheet/database to track relations/press release reception with different outlets Create a database of ideas for recipe videos and blogs - canvas those who may be interested in being interviewed for a blog Use analytics to analyse impact and audience of social media posts
4		Continue regular posting Begin roll-out of recipe videos and blogs	Have at least one video and blog ready to publish
5		Evaluate targets/goals with charity leadership Build up bank of recipe videos/blogs to go out Strategise over contacting celebrity chefs	Hold meeting with charity leadership Set up cloud drive with recipe videos/blogs and a schedule of those to go out - maybe a formula for others to follow on to Decide how to approach desired celebrities and which ones to approach

Measuring myself against the aforementioned SMART targets, I only achieved the first three targets:

- **Target #1:** By the end of my time at SKP I was posting on the account's Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn pages once a day, while also building up a bank of photos, future written posts and food quizzes to be used once I had departed, with at least two months of social media content written on a range of topics including SKP recipes and food education. **Result: Achieved.**
- **Target #2:** Though no journalists visited SKP during my stay, I arranged future appointments and visits with journalists from the BBC, Deutsche Welle, The Guardian and ARTE. These are expected to occur in September as SKP (like many other Greek organisations) closes in August. **Result: Achieved.**
- **Target #3:** I filmed and edited five "SKP Cooking Tips" videos designed to be published in the future. This taught me a lot about video production. **Result: Achieved.**
- **Target #4:** I was unable to obtain any commitments from celebrity chefs to visit SKP. However, I did interact with some on Instagram using the SKP account, which hopefully will increase the likelihood of a visit in the future. **Result: Not Achieved.**
- **Target #5:** This goal was devised by myself without having visited SKP beforehand, and once I arrived it became clear that a monthly newsletter was already being produced for SKP supporters and therefore my idea for a weekly newsletter/blog was not useful as SKP was prioritising a more consistent social media presence. **Result: Not Achieved.**

Already this shows a leadership lesson that I learnt quickly at SKP: **be ready to change your approach and goals.** The goals I had written up were written before I had experience of the day-to-day workings of SKP, so naturally they would have to change so that I could become a better member of the team.

Other lessons I learnt included:

- **Leadership is as much about listening as it is charting and following your own path**, and I realised through “leading” the charity’s social media and media efforts that I couldn’t write or photograph anything without consulting others first - on content, on photos, on facts. There’s not much of a hierarchy in SKP as it’s a small organisation, so consulting is quite informal and accessible which is a good introduction. **Relevant leadership attributes:** able to lead without authority; works collaboratively and across boundaries
- **Not being afraid to speak up when you have a differing opinion about something** - Evelina and I have had a lot of discussions where we’ve come to a compromise on approaches to social media and media, and therefore it’s a lot better to have these discussions earlier before they lead to miscommunication. **Relevant leadership attributes:** able to listen with understanding; makes effective decisions in complex environments; build relationships and networks
- **Leadership is about taking criticism and improving from it** - when I came to SKP I thought I could do everything right first time and operate quite independently, but the process of improving SKP’s media profile and advocacy has been more based on discussion between myself and other figures at the charity. It’s about learning to take criticism of your work, and not feeling personally hurt by it - ultimately you can only learn what not to do by not doing it. **Relevant leadership attributes:** learns continually, able to navigate new and foreign situations; honestly assess own knowledge;
- **Organisation is key** - I likely would never have got the interest of the Deutsche Welle journalist if I hadn’t have researched his beat and past work and kept track of the emails I had sent to him to ensure follow-ups. **Relevant leadership attributes:** makes things happen; prioritises activities and manages own time
- **Persistence pays off**, though ultimately you need to give people time to make up their minds. This was evident with my approach to gaining the interest of media organisations - by sending follow-up emails a week after original emails, I received multiple offers of interest back, showing that it is also a good idea to stay organised. **Relevant leadership attributes:** has energy and impact; turns ideas into action
- **My best ideas come in conversations with others**, and not necessarily when thinking alone. **Relevant leadership attributes:** honestly assess own leadership style
- **The importance of verbal communication** and making sure everyone knows what their part is and how to play it. While working on the food production line it became clear that everyone doing one job well was much more efficient than one person doing a lot of jobs. **Relevant leadership attributes:** speaks clearly and confidently
- **I can be forward about asking senior figures to do something to help me achieve my work properly** - just asking for small requests to help arrange photos in the right way. I used to be timid about this but ultimately I shouldn’t be afraid to ask someone for help in order to execute my role to the best of my ability - especially as they may ask me to do the same. **Relevant leadership attributes:** using emotional intelligence



## Impact

My time at SKP had a very big impact on me, both in terms of my development as a leader and on my future goals.

Out of all of the lessons I learnt at SKP, I think the most important one is that I prefer to be a hands-on person doing grunt work rather than taking a more backseat, senior role. Though I enjoyed the freedom that came with taking photographs and doing my best to promote SKP and therefore increase its positive impact feeding vulnerable people in Athens, I often felt uncomfortable that I wasn't directly contributing to SKP's goals. The days I found most rewarding at SKP were those in which I helped out in the kitchen and then published more advocacy-based posts drawing attention to the issues that Athenians (both refugees and not) faced including inflation, food security and the systemic problems with the EU's border policy that results in thousands of preventable deaths every year. All of this taught me that I feel most comfortable when I'm making direct contributions to the goals of the organisation I'm working for, and that I prefer to do tangible grunt work alongside more thought-based tasks.



Living in Athens also had a huge impact on me in terms of illustrating the reality of the world refugee crisis. I'd always cared about this issue and been disgusted by the way refugees and asylum seekers are treated and portrayed in the UK and across Europe, but going to SKP also helped me deconstruct some of my subconsciously paternalistic or patronising attitudes about refugees. Writing advocacy posts about refugee issues forced me to confront these attitudes head-on, as every word is scrutinised and interpreted by a wide audience online. Refugees are not "inspirational" or "resilient" - they're just people forced to make a difficult decision that should never be forced on anyone, and as those in a more fortunate position our job is to offer a helping hand if it's needed while still recognising their independence and autonomy, just as with anyone else. Also importantly, the constant news stories of boats capsizing in the Mediterranean during my stay illustrated that, for those not privileged or far away enough to ignore it, the refugee "crisis" that made headlines in 2015 never really ended. As someone studying ecology, I'm conscious that climate change and its impacts will force many people to make the difficult decision to leave home, and I hope one day to be able to find my place in helping those who do.



In terms of my project's impact at SKP and in Athens, it's quite hard to estimate because I slotted into an already-fantastic organisation which feeds up to 400 vulnerable people a day in the Greek capital. However, I hope through my social media posting that I was able to educate people on refugee life in Athens, teach them about food security and where our food comes from, and advocate for the right to safe passage for all refugees making the difficult decision to leave their homes. Moreover, I hope that the future meetings I set up for SKP with The Guardian, the BBC, Deutsche Welle and ARTE result in media coverage that increases people's understanding of refugee life in Athens and the day-to-day issues they face, as well as boosts SKP's profile leading to more donations and more resources with which to help more people in Athens.



### Future plans

It's difficult to talk about my future plans because I often make decisions when I know all of the paths in front of me. I'm currently in Canada studying for a year at McMaster University to finish off my undergraduate degree in ecology, and after that will likely be back in Leeds to do a one-year Master's as my degree is an Integrated Master's course. In terms of my future career, I'm still trying to decide between a number of paths: on the one hand I'm quite interested in pursuing an academic career in ecological research (as I quite enjoyed my research project last year!) but on the other I like the sound of working in restoration ecology, restoring damaged ecosystems to their previous health as far as possible. Then again, having worked as a journalist for a couple of years before

coming to university (and having worked as a part-time social media intern for an international investigative journalism network since January) I'm tempted to go back into the journalism world with a focus on environmental stories and investigations. The truth is the decision will likely become clearer to me in the future when the paths in front of me are clearer too.

Being part of the Laidlaw Leadership programme has certainly changed my outlook on my future plans though. As aforementioned it's piqued my interest in carrying out research, but also living in Athens for six weeks made me more comfortable with the idea of moving around for a career if it suits – I really enjoyed adapting to life in Athens, learning what little Greek I could, and discovering a city for the first time. This summer also outlined to me my passion for fighting for the rights of refugees – as well as the urgency of the problem – and though I'm not sure if it squares with my career plans, I'm certainly committed to dedicating time outside of work, whether that's going back to SKP to volunteer, finding more local support groups to where I am, or at least financially supporting groups who help refugees. At McMaster I'm already looking into societies which support refugees.

## Project Leader

Sam was a valuable asset to our team during his couple of months as a volunteer with us at Saffron Kitchen Project (SKP). He consistently went above and beyond in his responsibilities and demonstrated a positive attitude throughout his time with us. His dedication to learning and active participation was evident, as he quickly integrated himself into the team and established strong relationships with his colleagues. From the get-go he showed sensitivity, empathy and understanding of the environment we work in.

One of his notable strengths was his exceptional organizational skills, particularly in managing all of the media folders. He also took the initiative to create materials that can be utilized in the future, showcasing his forward-thinking approach. Sam's social media handover was incredibly well put together, providing a seamless transition for anyone who follows. This also demonstrated a genuine care in the growth of the project and how this could be done through media outlets. His know how of the digital platforms allowed for SKP's public image to grow and represent us in a professional manner. Sam's efforts in connecting the Saffron Kitchen Project with individuals who could assist with promotion and photography opened up SKP to a whole new network for which we are very grateful. He also contributed to the development of a great photo bank, which will undoubtedly benefit the project in the long run.

Sam took time and care in ensuring he set goals for his time with us even before his arrival, and he completed every task and goal set, managing his own time whilst still maintaining flexibility for anything that might pop up. He wasn't afraid to ask questions to ensure the maximum benefit of his time, but also eager to constantly be learning and developing skills. Organising weekly update meetings with myself and other members of the team, he made sure things happened and progressed. He rose to the challenge of having to cover and write on sensitive topics and issues as a representative SKP, and displayed an emotional intelligence at all times. His willingness to show respect towards everyone he worked with was clearly visible and his understanding of the sensitive context we work in was applaudable.

Overall, Sam was a pleasure to work with, consistently demonstrating professionalism, enthusiasm, and a strong work ethic. His contributions have made a significant impact on our team and the projects he was involved in. We highly appreciate his dedication and the positive energy he brought to the workplace and would happily welcome him back in the future!

Signature of Scholar

\_\_\_\_\_ Date:

Signature of Project Leader



\_\_\_\_\_ Date: 09/11/2023



## 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