

Scholar

Name:	Rebecca Hamer
Faculty:	Law School
Email address:	Lw21rh@leeds.ac.uk
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 project was a piece of participatory action research project in collaboration with Leeds City Council as well as a diverse range of young people (between the ages of 11 and 18) to investigate sustainable modes of transportation by identifying the barriers to active travel and brainstorming possible solutions in response to these. The project aimed to recognise the variety of viewpoints held by young people on active travel to extracurricular activities, create an initiative to promote active travel in Leeds with the participation of young people, and review that initiative, and creatively present the results to shareholders.

The original plan was to conduct numerous focus group sessions with youth group members in the spring of 2022, and then to recruit a small amount of these young people to train as "peer researchers", who would carry out trial projects within their organisations. However, due to time constraints and recruitment issues, the project plan had to be adapted in order for us to still meet our aims in the allotted time.

Therefore, we ran a couple of two-hour focus group sessions at the start of summer, to identify the key barriers to young people who are considering more active methods of travel, and then took this information in to a 3-day research session with our main focus group – young people from Kentmere Community Centre. We ran interactive sessions across the 3 days, such as a virtual and non-virtual walk around the local area, to encourage the young people to think about their every-day journeys and the barriers they face. We also discussed the findings from the previous focus groups, and had lots of discussions with the young people to get qualitative data about their feelings surrounding active travel. From there, the participants were encouraged to put these barriers in to categories, such as safety, cost and practicality. We also discussed who would be best suited to influence change, with groups such as the council, police and youth organisations being suggested. On the final day, we created a grid, with the barriers on the left side, and those who could

potentially make changes across the top. From there, the participants suggested solutions to the barriers by identifying a barrier and a person/group, and then what that person/group could do to reduce the impact of the barrier. Part of my role was also to document this process and create infographics about the findings, with the intention that it will be shared with those who may find it relevant at a later date.

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

The environment is a topic of ever-growing importance. With issues regarding climate change becoming increasingly serious, and with growing concerns about people's health and the obesity crisis, active travel is becoming increasingly significant. As a result, many councils have attempted to encourage people to travel as actively as possible. Leeds City Council in particular are trying to reduce the amount of car users in the city, and have conducted research on this topic, however, youth were not included in this research. Additionally, current schemes to increase active travel, such as the cycle to work scheme, are targeted at adults, rather than young people. As a result, this research was not only important in regard to assisting to improve current and topical worldwide issues, but it was also important as it included young people, who have previously not had much of a say in terms of what barriers there are to active travel.

Throughout this research, we also gained findings we had not anticipated. In particular, the young people raised very insightful and important points about the lack of communication between them and groups with greater power to incite change, such as the council. It is important that this changes, as young people have less of a say than adults in politics, in regard to the fact they are unable to vote, yet the decisions made by the Government and local councils will impact their futures. In particular, the growing dangers of climate change and poor health will have worse effects for young people, as they will outlive current voters, and have to deal with the consequences of any reductions in overall quality of life. This project was important as we were able to create an opportunity for a conversation to be opened between young people and the changemakers, as our findings will be reported back to the council.

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

This research has impacted my university experience in many more ways than I anticipated. I thoroughly enjoyed my time participating in the project, and it was an experience I feel will be a highlight of my time in education. Most importantly, the skills and lessons it taught me have had a profound impact.

It taught me the importance of adaptability, something that I have definitely experienced, and will continue to experience, as I progress through University. My original role description changed substantially from what it was

when I was assigned my place on the project. Originally, my role was to disseminate the research findings through means more accessible to young people, such as social media. However, I ended up spending the majority of my time assisting with collecting the data, and documenting this process through videos and pictures. I had to be flexible and open to change, which is something that will greatly impact my studies. I am having to adapt to the blended learning approach, and am still finding my feet when it comes to the most effective ways to study and note-taking, so the development of my adaptability skill, and the lessons I have learnt in staying calm and open to new approaches, will be highly beneficial as I progress through University. I also ended up loving being a researcher, so the experience in itself has greatly increased my enjoyment of my University experience.

I also gained knowledge of what it is like to work in an interdisciplinary team, and the importance of having a variety of sources of knowledge and perspectives. The development of my team-work skill and understanding of the importance of alternative opinions will be invaluable when it comes to my University examinations, as many projects require you to do group presentations or projects, and the process of exploring different points of view will assist in my ability to analyse data and literature. Overall, I therefore feel this project has not only increased my overall enjoyment of my time at University, but it has also taught me key skills and lessons that will help me to tackle the rest of my time in education.

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

Able to lead without authority, able to work and think independently, and prioritises activities and manages own time

- Part of this project did involve taking initiative. Every member of the research team had a different focus, and we all fed back on our work at the end of the week. There were times I had completed directed tasks by mid-week, or was left with lots of freedom and little direction, so I had to anticipate what would be the most useful course of action for me to take whilst I was waiting for feedback on how best I could assist them.
- For example, I knew that the dissemination of the research findings via social media, which is what my original role was supposed to be, would end up being done after my time on the project was up. Therefore, I suggested creating templates for infographics that the rest of the team could use once I was gone.
- Additionally, my fellow Laidlaw Scholar and I took charge over the photographic and video documentation aspect of the project. We researched the most effective ways to disseminate research via social media and took photos and videos on the research sessions, which we used to create infographics and reels. We were given little direction,

and were trusted to create appropriate resources to match the aims of the project and our roles.

Cultural intelligence and capacity for empathy, able to listen with understanding, and capitalises on the power of diversity

- During the project, I spoke to young people about barriers to active travel, which required me to attempt to see the world of travel from their shoes. They bravely opened up about health issues, personal matters, daily challenges they faced, and feelings of stigmatisation they felt, and I had to empathise with them, despite me not facing some of the battles that they had.
- It was important that I understood why things that are not a barrier for me as an adult, or due to my background, may be a strong barrier for young people, particularly those from a different background, as it is important that any changes that are implemented to increase active travel are accessible to as many people as possible, and that we are aware of as many barriers as possible, so we can introduce the best possible solutions. Additionally, the young people raised issues I would never have thought of, highlighting the importance of consulting people from a variety of ages and backgrounds.

Seeks out and fosters innovation and creativity, uses digital connectivity

- Whilst I was assigned the role on this project because of my knowledge of social media and creativity, I still had a lot to learn. I had to research new design software and which methods of digital research dissemination would be the best at engaging young people. I used online articles but also asked questions to the young people we worked with to identify which social media sites were used most commonly by young people. I also experimented with design software such as Canva to creatively display our findings, and learnt new skills on apps such as TikTok, so that I was able to make more engaging videos to document the research process.
- Additionally, for the majority of the research process I was working digitally. I had to stay on top of emails and regular Microsoft Teams meetings, and we managed to keep good communication throughout the research, despite us working, at times, over 200 miles apart!

Able to navigate new and foreign situations, works collaboratively and across boundaries and learns continually

- Conducting research in itself was a new situation for me to be in. I had previously studied research, in particular research methods, at college, when I studied A Level Sociology, but I had never actually been involved in the actual data collection before. I was constantly learning new things, for example about ethics forms and research grants.
- I also realised how imperfect research can be! From the outside, research always seemed so thorough and well-polished, but I never realised how much researchers had to adapt and overcome. During the project, our team faced issues with recruitment and time constraints, and we had to work together to think of new methods we could use to meet our aims by the appropriate deadline. It required great adaptation of my role but also of our entire plan for data collection, and we all had to adapt quickly but calmly, in order to complete the project. Due to the complexities of this, we also had to all take control of specific areas of task delegation as well as collaboration.

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

Dissemination as part of the research project

- Infographics and video reels
 - o During my time in the project, I documented much of the process and the findings in videos and infographics, which I gave to the rest of the project team to use as they wish. Once the rest of the team have finished analysing the data and the project is concluded, these visual aids will be shown to sponsors, Leeds City Council and the Yorkshire Sports Trust, and then posted on social media platforms such as Twitter, to share our findings with both the public and those who will take the findings on board and hopefully utilise them and implement some of our proposed solutions.

Dissemination as part of the overall Laidlaw Scholarship

- Laidlaw Network
 - o I am currently in the process of uploading some of the above infographics and videos on to the Laidlaw Network, so that fellow Scholars are able to gain knowledge about what my research project was and the key takeaways.
- Research poster
 - o I am also currently working on the creation of a poster to summarise the project and the findings, which will also be uploaded on to the network when completed, and that I intend to share with the other researchers involved in the project.

What are your future career or educational plans?

Whilst I have always known that I have a passion for law, and would like to undertake some kind of legal career, (probably in a solicitor role), I have never been quite sure which area I would like to specialise in. I am currently really enjoying the study of criminal law, but I have also always wanted to work with families or young people, perhaps as a youth criminal justice lawyer or a divorce lawyer. Another area of interest would be doing something relating to sports law, such as contract negotiation on behalf of sports players, as my main hobby outside of my studies is watching and participating in sporting activities.

As a result of this project, I have also been inspired to consider environmental law. I found that working with people so passionate about active travel has inspired me to learn more about it, and whilst I may not do it as a career, I am definitely interested in learning more about it through my studies. It also heightened my interest in working with young people. I am passionate about increasing the conversations had between young people and adults, as greater understanding of every member of society will always be beneficial when it comes to improving the world for everyone in it. If I do become a youth lawyer, I would also like to be a campaigner for societal change – listening to the stories of young people, and working with adults, particularly those in positions of power, to open a dialogue between the two to try and understand the societal factors that impact youth crime rates.

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.

During this project Rebecca has shown remarkable adaptability and willingness to approach new challenges with a positive attitude.

Although I'm aware Rebecca has a background in sociology before her degree, she continued to develop cultural intelligence through listening to and respecting young people. Young people's right to participate and 'be heard' requires both a particular attitude towards young people, and a set of skills around listening and asking the right questions. Rebecca showed all of these in her work with young people, building rapport, showing respect for a diverse group, and making young people feel listened to. Should her legal career take

her into working with children or young people, this stands her in good stead for working with younger clients.

She showed an ability to listen to young people by competently summarising and reflecting their comments, particularly around barriers young people face with regard to active travel. She was about to communicate sensitively with them around the problems they face, and they could engage in ongoing analysis of those conversations through reflecting and drawing out key themes from the focus groups.

Rebecca (and Maria) were give the task of leading less-youthful academics in understanding how to engage in young people-friendly dissemination activities from the research. As such, we were able to provide an ultimate aim (a set of resources we could use to present the findings and participatory processes we used) but we could not provide much direction on how to get there. They researched existing good practice in youth-friendly dissemination, created a tool kit for dissemination methods, and then produced resources and templates for this project.

Signature of Scholar



Date: 14/9/22

Signature of Project Leader



Date: 28/8/22

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

