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Cohort: 2022

Final Reflective Report Laidlaw

Impact report on LiA Experience

Project, workshops and activities

The 'Leadership in Action' part of my Laidlaw journey was spent working for the Egypt Foundation for Refugee Rights. Throughout these 6 weeks, I organised and conducted a 5-week program to facilitate the integration of refugees in the city of Cairo. This program focused on language learning, employability and workshops aimed at understanding the importance of community when away from the country of origin. The group consisted in 20 refugees coming from Syria, Sudan and Yemen. I was also assigned a translator by EFRR to facilitate the understanding between the group and I. In the first week I focused on the planning of the program and was based in EFRR's Cairo office. Subsequently, in the second week I was moved to Le'Anak Insan Foundation for Development in Giza that kindly offered their space for the purpose of conducting the workshops and classes of the following weeks. I then started with the first week of classes, which mainly focused on getting to know the group I was assigned and conducting different workshops on the importance of community and working collaboratively. After making sure the members of the group warmed up to each other after the first workshops, in the second and third week of the program we concentrated on language learning. We mainly focused on conversational English since it was deemed to be the most useful skill according to the refugee community I was working with. Through these classes, the group managed to get more comfortable speaking English, learn new vocabulary and feel more comfortable getting out of the comfort zone. Subsequently, in the third week we focused on employability and I helped the group making their CVs, learning how to conduct a job interview in English and helping them with terminology specific to their areas of expertise. In the last week, I conducted a workshop about integration in Cairo through which we worked through challenges and problems navigating Cairo and adapting to Egyptian culture and traditions. On the last day, after asking for feedback regarding the program I conducted, we had a 'graduation ceremony' and a little party celebrating the end of the 5-week program.

Outcomes and Objectives

This 6-week experience was very forming and I really enjoyed the work I was conducting. I really liked working with EFRR and I am very grateful to them, especially to my coordinator Mr. Ahmed Badawy, for giving me the opportunity to independently conduct this program and for making it happen in the first place. It was very nice to work with people who really care about what they do and are so committed to the cause their organisation supports. I can confidently say that after working in this environment I am more aware of the reality behind forced migration and what both refugees and organisations work through to make this experience as smooth as possible. While working at the Cairo Office of the organisation, which mainly provides legal support to refugees, I was exposed to narratives and stories of refugees that are certainly very hard to hear and deal with. I was very impressed by the work conducted by the lawyers at the office and their temper working with such vulnerable communities. Some of the girls working at the office, namely Rawan and Noor, are of my same age and it is very inspiring to see their dedication to their work, which definitely motivated me throughout the six weeks and still stands as an example for the future.

Moreover, I was also very inspired by the refugees themselves. Seeing their determination in rebuilding their careers in Cairo and improving their chances of employability by learning English really impressed me. They were all very committed to the 5-week course in order to get the most out of it and tried their very best class after class. I was very proud to see the progress they made and above all, the community they created in the 5 weeks. By the end of the 5 weeks we all became very close and learned to help each other. On the last day I conducted a survey to ask the group what they thought of the program, things they would change and any comments they wanted to add. All of the comments were extremely positive but one above all stuck with me: 'When I got to Cairo from Sudan I could only see darkness and I didn't know how to put an end to these negative emotions. You and this course brought light back into my life and I now know I can be happy again'. I did not know that with only 6 weeks I could make such a huge impact in these people's lives and change their outlook on their lives in Cairo. I will never forget these 6 weeks, the people I met, the stories I have heard and the things I have learned from these experiences. I will always be grateful to each and every one of them for the time spent together, their commitment to the course and the way they treated me.

Future plans for the project

I am planning to conduct this 5-week project again in both Cairo and my country of origin, Italy. I have already arranged to go back to Cairo next summer to work in the same field and I am just working out some last details. In terms of my idea to start the same project in Italy, I have had the chance to present my project to some of the members of NGOs that I have interviewed in the first summer for my 6-week research project. The idea is to conduct the project in Sicily, which is considered Europe's biggest port of entry from the Mediterranean. I really hope future projects will have similar outcomes than the ones achieved last summer and I am thrilled to go ahead with the workshops and classes. In the mean time, I have started to work with refugees in the context of Ireland as well and I am now teaching conversation classes for a project between Trinity College and Fáilte Isteach.

General Reflection on the Laidlaw Scholarship

My Understanding of Leadership and development throughout the program

Throughout the last 18 months my understanding of leaderships has significantly changed. Looking back at my application material, I still believe in most of the things I said and align with the values I advocated for, but having a better understanding of what it means to put this into practice, my leadership has become more realistic and grounded. Having had the opportunity to lead both my independent research in summer 1 and my 6-week project in summer 2, I have learned to adapt my leadership style to different situations, circumstances and people. I have understood that as a leader, when things don't go smoothly, I am the one who is in charge of getting everything back on track but that this does not mean that I need to take responsibility for everything that goes wrong. This notion immensely helped me throughout the scholarship and gave me the power to overcome one of my main weaknesses in terms of leadership, pessimism. Throughout the second summer I have found myself in situations where I had no choice but to find an alternative to make everything work and dealt with it without blaming it on myself but with the understanding that I do not have power over every situation. When I started the program I was so focused on the achievement of a specific result in a specific timeframe that I almost forgot to enjoy the process and take it easy on both myself and the people working with me. After this 18 month program I have understood that making the process as enjoyable as possible and being positive allows every team to efficiently reach their aims and celebrate their achievements.

Moreover, thanks to the Lead Days, I have also managed to identify and work on one of the biggest weaknesses in my leadership, people pleasing. In one of the workshops on LEAD Day 4, we answered some questions and then got divided into groups according to our responses. One of the Leadership characteristics I had to work on was my people pleasing behaviour and I got to speak to some of the other members of my cohort who were dealing with the same issue. This really helped me understand how this personality trait affects my leadership style and encouraged me to work on it before my Leadership in Action. This helped me create clearer boundaries and take on the right amount of work instead of taking on more work than what I should have.

Feedback on the Laidlaw Program

Overall, I would say that the Laidlaw program is a great opportunity for undergraduate students to grow as a person and as a leader by undertaking research, going on a 6-week placement, meeting new people, getting out of your comfort zone on the Leadership Days and networking. I am personally very happy with my development over the past 18 months and I believe the Laidlaw Scholarship played a major part in the various decisions I have made in terms of my future career. This program definitely helped me establish some of my future goals and encouraged me to find a way to achieve them. While before this program some of them felt so unrealistic and unachievable, I now have more confidence in my abilities. Moreover, it was a great chance for networking, through both the research project and the Leadership in Action. After meeting so many people working in the field I am interested in, I have a clearer idea of the various possible careers and the path to get there. Having had the chance to talk to experts in the field has also helped me create a solid network that can help me in the future. It has been a pleasure to work with the Trinity Laidlaw team as well as my supervisors for the research project and the LiA and I am very grateful to them for the help received throughout the 18 months.

Next steps

My summer 1 research, which focused on the impact on Covid-19 on the arrival of Syrian and Palestinian refugees from Lebanon to Europe, and my Summer 2 placement with the Egypt Foundation for Refugee Rights really encouraged me to write my final year dissertation on similar themes as well and seek for the same supervisor from my first summer. Therefore, I am currently working on my Capstone project, which will deal with the formation of identity within diaspora

communities, with a focus on children of the Syrian and Palestinian diasporas in Lebanon. Moreover, I am also currently applying for Master's Degrees in Forced Migration Studies in various universities in the UK and Southern Europe to further enhance my career in the field. The opportunities offered from the Laidlaw Foundation really helped me choose what to focus on in my future career. I was always very interested in Forced Migration but I never thought I could work in it in the future and these 18 months really made it clear for me that this is really what I want to focus on. While before I was always sure I wanted to stay in academia and go into a PhD, after working directly with refugees I believe I can make more of an impact working directly with them, at least earlier on my career, and apply for a PhD later on. Therefore, after the Master's degree, my plan is to apply to work for a local or international NGO in either Italy or Egypt and then see from there whether I want to apply for a PhD a few years later.