

Laidlaw Summer 2 Final Reflective Report

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Impact Report

I completed my Leadership in Action (LiA) with a UK charity 'Over The Wall' (OTW). They provide free residential camps to children affected by serious illnesses. My LiA aimed to enhance these camps through planning activities, gathering camper feedback for programme improvement and gaining confidence through leading activities.

OTW is a unique place where children in wheelchairs, with visual impairments, cancer and numerous illnesses get to laugh and remember what it's like to be a child again. I completed my LiA with OTW because they provide a mechanism for children and their families to get some respite from their illness and remember that even though life can be exceedingly unfair at times, they have the strength and resilience to persevere by focusing on the positives and remembering they are not alone.

I began my LiA in the headquarters in Havant. It was exciting yet daunting going to a different country on my own. I developed communication skills meeting the CEO and other staff in the office and learned how the organisation operates. I attended therapeutic recreation training and learned how every activity incorporates challenge, success, discovery and reflection. I also led my first sketching activity at camp 365 which was virtual for children who are too sick to attend in person. I was nervous as this was my first time leading an activity but I enjoyed interacting with campers.

After conducting inventory management in the warehouse and finding instruments, I created my activity 'Top of the Pops' where campers could create their own music video. I developed presentation skills as I pitched my ideas to the camp director. Once approved, I created an activity plan and risk assessment and used Canva to create backstage passes for campers. I adapted the activity for children with different accessibility needs and liaised

with the nursing coordinator to ensure everyone could fully participate. I presented my final ideas to the activities team and enjoyed working alongside other staff, developing my teamwork and collaboration skills.

I originally planned to put the music videos on the Camp 365 portal. However, it was decided that the service was to be discontinued. I had to problem solve to come up with an alternative way for campers to see their videos. I decided to show the videos at camper reunions instead and liaised with the media team to ensure they had sufficient time to edit the videos.

I faced a challenge on my way back from Havant as my flight got cancelled and I was stuck in Southampton airport. It was daunting when the airport closed for the evening. However, I persevered, got a hotel and taxi and changed my flight to the next available flight the following day. I never experienced a cancelled flight on my own before in a city I was unfamiliar with, but I got through it and built resilience.

I was excited to lead activities and push myself out of my comfort zone at the campsite, Whitemoor Lakes in Lichfield. I learned to be a resilient and adaptable leader. The first week, the activity coordinator fell ill. However, I persevered and had additional responsibilities in preparing activities in the evenings and clearing away between activities. In my second week, a number of volunteers tested positive for covid and as a result some campers had to isolate. This was challenging keeping campers safe and continuing to lead activities to ensure every child still had a wonderful time.

Another challenge was that as the camp day started between 8:00 and 8:30 am and often didn't finish till about 11pm, it was exhausting doing so many camps in a row especially with family camp at the weekend also. However, I genuinely loved leading at camp and seeing first-hand the impact it had on the children. Each day I led approximately four activities ranging from 'Tops of the Pops' to 'The Chase' and in the evening I led camp fires and festivals to groups of around 40 people. As the weeks progressed, I enjoyed presenting in front of people. I was no longer nervous, and I think this is something invaluable to have as a leader. Additionally, I assisted in chaperoning campers to Manchester twice and to Bristol twice. This involved long days on buses, but it ensured these campers could attend the camps. I attended activity debrief every lunchtime where I provided feedback on positives

and negatives in activities. For example, I led a group of 8-10 year olds in “The Chase” but they found the challenges too difficult. The following week, I ran a Lego Activity to keep them more occupied and they really enjoyed this activity. Every evening, there was an all-staff debrief where I was responsible for presenting an update on activities for the day.

I learned the importance of gathering feedback directly from campers. At the beginning of each week we created boxes with labels ‘I feel confident’, ‘I am nervous’, ‘I miss home’ and ‘I’m excited’. There were 80 campers at each camp and we gave each camper a coloured counter based on their age they, and they put a counter in the box that represented how they felt. We repeated this at the end of the week. This showed as the week progressed more campers were confident and less missed home. It was also interesting seeing the differences across age group. Each day we gave sheets to campers to fill out to get their honest anonymous feedback about activities.

Corporate sponsors came to camp a couple of days and I was responsible for leading activities and explaining to them how it works. I enjoyed spending the day with the sponsors and loved the opportunity to tell them all about camp. This really developed my communication skills. Another day there was an annual Ofsted inspection. Ofsted are part of the UK standards in education, children’s services and skills who inspect services that provide education and skills for people of all ages.

Overall, as a result of my LiA experience, I’ve developed my confidence and presentation skills through leading activities. I understand the need for reflection and gathering feedback from others as a leader and the importance of being empathetic to the needs of others to ensure everyone is included regardless of ability. These are skills that I will definitely carry forward into my final year of university and my future career. I developed creative activities which will continue into the future of OTW and gathered feedback and adjusted camp activities to further improve camps that take place next summer in the future.

Reflective Report

Throughout my Laidlaw journey I have had the opportunity to push myself out of my comfort zone and become the kind of leader I want to be in the world - someone who empowers others to reach their potential, leads by example, is empathetic to the needs of others and is able to clearly communicate.

Through leading activities during my LiA I saw first-hand the impact on campers. One camper told me they were always too afraid to perform in front of others, but they no longer have stage fright as a result of my activities. This was such honest, reflective feedback and it made me feel so inspired that as a result of my leadership of the activity I could empower a child to have confidence. I think I have become a leader who guides and empowers others to reach their full potential.

A challenge I experienced as a leader is that at the beginning of the Laidlaw programme I found giving presentations really difficult and I used to get very nervous. However, through the leadership days during the Laidlaw programme and leading activities at during my LiA I have seen my confidence grow. I surprised myself as I now enjoy giving presentations in front of people. This is such an important skill to have as a leader and something I am very grateful to the Laidlaw programme for giving me the opportunity to develop.

I watched as some of the other leaders at the camp sometimes lost control of their groups, got nervous presenting to groups of people or experienced stress in their leadership role. I have reflected on seeing other styles of leadership throughout my LiA and learned that a leader must gain respect from the group they are leading in order to get their attention. This involves being kind while also being firm at the same time. It is so important to treat the people you are leading with respect and then they will respect you. It is also important to not get visibly stressed in a leadership role, you have to have confidence and self-belief to know that you can do it. I have also learned that it is important to ask for assistance if you need it.

I have also become a leader who can clearly communicate. Through attending a variety of leadership sessions throughout my time as a Laidlaw scholar I have spoken to numerous fellow students and made great friends. I also learned during my LiA leading activities that if you don't communicate clearly to your team then you can't expect them to perform.

Communication really is key to success and I developed excellent communication skills through clearly explaining the activities and making sure that everyone knew what they are supposed to do. I have gained so much confidence as a result of the Laidlaw programme.

I really enjoyed the challenge of going to a new country on my own for my LiA. This international element pushed me out of my comfort zone and I really built my communication skills as there was no-one else from Ireland so I had to find other common ground to talk to people about. During my Laidlaw journey I was on international exchange in Barnard College, Columbia University in New York. This was an amazing experience of moving away from home for the first time and I definitely gained confidence as a result.

I also learned that a leader is someone who needs to be very organised. This is something I experienced during my first summer of research as I made a detailed plan of what I would accomplish each week. I also experienced this through my LiA as the logistics that go into running the camp require so much future planning and logistics.

I have learned that I am a very adaptable leader. Despite staff members falling sick during my LiA and other challenges I was able to persevere and continue leading activities while adapting to the challenges at hand. I have gained project management skills as I was responsible for organising both my first summer placement and my second summer placement. These project management skills I have developed will definitely be useful in final year and during my future career.

Through completing my LiA at OTW, I have become utterly conscious of the unfairness that exists in the world. There were often times when I looked around at the children while leading activities and my heart broke at the injustice that they had all spent significant amounts of time in hospital and have been through difficult journeys of recovery from a variety of illnesses. They have experienced such difficulties and I have unwavering admiration for their strength and bravery. I have such empathy for the campers and have become empowered to do something that positively improves the lives of patients. While I love studying statistics and computer science in college, without a doubt my Laidlaw experience has shaped my future career path significantly. I now know that I want to do something related to improving patients' lives and trying to make a positive impact. I would rather do something that makes a meaningful impact with my career. My first summer

involved researching the impact of Covid-19 on outpatient care in Ireland. This was my first exposure to completing a healthcare related project using my data analysis skills and I loved unearthing meaningful results from the data. This has led me to explore future career and masters courses related to healthcare and data-analytics as a result.

In summary, through completing my Laidlaw journey I have met a diverse range of people and have formed lasting friendships, I have pushed myself out of my comfort zone and learned lifelong skills that I will carry forward into the future. Laidlaw has given me the opportunity to explore my interests outside of my degree and has given me the tools to become an ethical, confident, compassionate and global leader. As a result of Laidlaw, my future career path has changed and it has given me the confidence to pursue my passions.