

From Setbacks to Scholarships: My Journey of Resilience, Discovery, and Global Impact as a Laidlaw Scholar

My story is not just about a scholarship; it is a tale of resilience, self-discovery, and global connection that began with a twist of fate. Picture this: I had my heart set on the University of Glasgow, believing it was the perfect place for my personal and academic growth. That dream took an unexpected detour when an email from the Admissions Team in July shattered my plans. I was told I needed a Math's certificate, a requirement that had never been mentioned before. My university dream was suddenly on hold, and I felt lost.

With time running out, and no clear answers, I had to make a tough decision. I reluctantly declined Glasgow's offer, and turned to my second choice, the University of York. While York promised an excellent education, my heart still yearned for the Scottish adventure. That feeling of disappointment stayed with me until March 2022 when an email about the Laidlaw Foundation and their scholarship program landed in my inbox. This was my chance to dive into research, something that had drawn me to the UK in the first place. With nothing to lose and everything to gain, I took the leap.

A few months later, I got the news that changed everything—I was officially a Laidlaw Scholar.

Personally, my Laidlaw journey has been like turning on a spotlight, revealing my hidden strengths and untapped potential. I found my footing in a world of adaptability, comfortably navigating different environments and connecting with diverse people. I stepped out of my comfort zone, pushed my boundaries, and discovered a reservoir of patience I never knew I had. My communication skills, a strong suit to begin with, flourished further. I became a skilled team player, adept at both leading and supporting others. Most importantly, I began to carry myself with a newfound confidence, embracing fresh opportunities and leadership roles. This transformation might never have happened had I stuck to my original plan at Glasgow, where the Laidlaw program is not offered.

Collaboratively, the Laidlaw journey took me to the heart of teamwork. The residentials and workshops taught me the art of active listening and the power of inclusion. I became the advocate for venturing out of our comfort zones, and in doing so, I found myself facing my own fears. During the Pickering Residential, I confronted something I had always feared:

abseiling. With a dose of motivation and encouragement, I not only conquered that fear but ended up enjoying it twice.

The Laidlaw Network introduced me to scholars from around the world, including the United States, Canada, and Hong Kong. Engaging with these bright minds expanded my horizons and sparked a passion for exploring new cultures. That contributed to my decision to take on my LiA project in Romania. To give back to the Laidlaw Network, I documented my journey on the Laidlaw network, from my psychology research in York to my adventures in Romania.

One of the most impactful aspects of this journey has been my relationship with my mentor, Nick Barraclough. He has been more than a supervisor; he's become a guiding force in my academic journey. Nick not only encouraged my research interests but also invited me to contribute to the lab, a collaboration that extended into my final year. Together, we are eagerly waiting for the official publication of a research paper—an opportunity I am incredibly grateful for.

The Laidlaw experience has empowered me to make a positive impact on the world. In my first summer, I dived into research on action perception and autistic traits in the general population, shedding light on the misconception that one's position on the autistic spectrum affects action perception. This discovery has far-reaching implications for developing autism-detection tests and therapy sessions.

My second summer was all about meaningful impact as I volunteered with a local NGO, helping seven adolescents who had been removed from foster care in Romania. My mission was to discuss with them various taboo topics in Romania, from sexual education to bullying and cyberbullying, social media presence, smoking, and vaping. This initiative equipped them with the knowledge to make informed choices as they navigated the transition into adulthood. As their mentor, I witnessed their growth and maturity even if over a brief period. My connection with two young ladies from the NGO endures, as I continue to mentor them and help them enhance their English skills.

Both experiences have allowed me to give back to the communities I have been a part of, igniting a sense of fulfilment and inclusivity as I actively contribute to a brighter future.

To end, I want to express my heartfelt thanks for the transformative scholarship, support, and empowerment I have received. The Laidlaw Foundation, the University of York team and my mentor have all played a pivotal role in shaping my academic journey, and I am deeply grateful for their guidance. This opportunity has not only opened doors but has also allowed me to make a positive impact on communities. Your generosity has made a profound difference, and I am committed to making the most of this incredible opportunity. As I look ahead, my commitment to making a positive impact remains unwavering, and the leadership skills I have developed through the Laidlaw experience will undoubtedly play a big role in shaping that future.

Yours Sincerely,

Alessia Vlasceanu