

I originally undertook the Laidlaw Scholarship to build a network of academically ambitious individuals, bulk up my CV with leadership experience and aid my Master's degree applications. However, these original intentions were swiftly expanded upon attending the sessions about the social change model of leadership (1994) and integrating myself into the cohort. As someone who previously had experiences in jobs where there was a clear hierarchy and bureaucratic process which often blocked inclusive and accessible principles, the model was enlightening as it aligned with my core personal values and helped me conclude there is a place for people with my attitudes in favour of collaboration and desire to be socially responsible in leadership.

Beyond leadership experience, the process of the scholarship also provided me with authentic learning experiences of navigating the workplace as a disabled individual and how to effectively communicate my needs and barriers. This real-world experience has been so valuable in ways I had not anticipated and has boosted my confidence in applying for future opportunities.

Yet, the most satisfying aspect of my time undertaking the scholarship has been the tangible impact I have managed to have in my local community during the LiA constructing an LGBTQI+ inclusion toolkit for the Older Citizens Advocacy York charity. This work allowed me to further my research experience and utilise the skills I developed in the previous year under the critical yet supportive supervision of Henrice Altink. To learn the skill of formulating academic concepts of sexuality, intersectionality and historical contexts into an accessible and approachable medium was not only beneficial to my future career progression but also for my community in advancing inclusion at a local advocacy charity. By developing this skill, I found myself having incredibly collaborative and informative conversations with my primary contact and advocacy manager Dan Brittan who provided me with invaluable information about connecting with the target demographic, their needs, and the service user experience at OCAY. I incorporated this into my outcome to best meet their needs and for my project to have the largest impact possible. Dan's expertise allowed me to critically consider the fundamental issue of academic application within a community setting: how impactful can an inclusion project be if it lacks actual utility?

It has been a tumultuous, yet enlightening experience and I am so thankful to the Laidlaw Foundation for the opportunity to have been able to experience this level of personal, academic, and professional growth and to have connected with scholars not only in York but across the country. To have been able to meet and form lasting friendships with so many critical thinkers and passionate individuals has been the highlight of my undergraduate degree. I would also like to extend a thank you to the incredible York Laidlaw Team for all their support and willingness to discuss ethical concerns. The team has set a lasting and aspirational model of leadership by demonstrating great leadership must go beyond rhetoric and the aesthetic of social responsibility- it requires a commitment to action.