

## **Final Report on my Laidlaw Experience - Naomi Thomas**

The Laidlaw Scholarship has honestly been the best opportunity I have had access to at university. Looking back, I can't quite believe all of the experiences it has offered me, and the networks I have been able to make! I entered the programme hoping to gain experience for a career in research or charity management. However, I ended up gaining so much more from it than just that.

I found the whole experience immensely inspiring. In York and at the Scholars' conference, I heard and saw what ordinary people - scholars like myself - had achieved just by standing up for what they believed in. I also spent six weeks working with a group of activists in Mexico, which was just incredible. I learnt so much about the way they perceived the world: they refused to give up, even when an issue seemed unsurmountable.

I learnt that leadership doesn't necessarily mean being loud, or always having an opinion right away. This was definitely a relief! Thanks to this, I felt much more confident when I was thrown into the deep end with my LIA. I had to coordinate a group of volunteers so that we could run workshops for about 65 participants in all. This was on a scale that I'd never worked before - my leadership in the past has always been with groups of about 20 at most. Therefore, I had to step up my game and oversee a lot of organisational details so that everything ran smoothly on the days. I now feel much more comfortable with managing larger events - something I hope to do in my future career.

Another skill I gained was with regard to teamwork. I got on very well with my project partner for my LIA, but each of us had a very different idea about how the project should look, and what our priorities were. Learning to navigate this team dynamic was certainly worthwhile. It taught me how to find balance and compromise, and how to play to different people's strengths.

I think that the biggest visible impact I had was probably through my work in Mexico. The kids (and adults!) evidently enjoyed the workshops - they didn't want to stop some of the activities! However, I am most proud of what I achieved through my research project. After all, body image is still such a prominent and under-discussed concern. Just recently, Gwyneth Paltrow's body double from *Shallow Hal* opened up about how the media treated her after that film's release. Therefore, I'm really glad to have contributed to that field, and I hope that my research and poetic outputs will have an impact in some way.

Finally, I would really like to thank the Laidlaw Foundation for this generous opportunity. I am also incredibly grateful for the support given to me by the York Laidlaw Scholarship team, my project supervisor Professor Henrice Altink, the MakeSense team, and Pancho and Amanda from Huerto Roma Verde. This experience would not have been possible without any of them!