

Laidlaw Reflective Report

Introduction

Joining the Laidlaw Programme was driven by a desire to enhance my leadership skills and contribute meaningfully to my community, along with getting the opportunity to do research in an area that I am interested in during Summer 1. The promise of structured development, practical experience, and the opportunity to network with like-minded individuals was really appealing. Over the course of the programme, my motivations have continued to push me on, but have also evolved from simply wanting to improve my leadership abilities to a deeper understanding of the impact effective leadership can have on communities and individuals.

Personal and Leadership Development

Initially, my primary motivation for joining the Laidlaw Programme was to acquire leadership skills that would be beneficial in my professional and personal life. However, as I progressed through the programme, my focus shifted towards using these skills to drive positive change in my community. The hands-on projects, combined with the LEAD sessions, and the annual conference highlighted the importance of social responsibility and the profound effect of leadership on community well-being.

Throughout the leadership development experiences, I learned the importance of collaboration and seeking diverse perspectives by simply asking for help. Teamwork was a core component of the Laidlaw programme, and I will use all the skills developed countless times in my future career and personal life. This approach to challenges has enabled me to handle challenges more effectively, using the strengths and insights of others.

One of the most challenging aspects of the leadership development sessions was engaging in activities that required vulnerability and when I was required to push myself out of my comfort zone, such as self-reflection exercises, and public speaking. These sessions were instrumental in fostering self-awareness and personal growth. Additionally, navigating discussions on cultural humility and ethical leadership required a deep level of introspection and openness to change, and these topics were quite new to me so I learned so much.

The LEAD sessions provided many constructive takeaways. Group discussions were particularly beneficial, offering different insights into various topics including conflict resolution and problem solving. These activities often pushed me out of my comfort zone, challenging me to get to know new people, and work as part of a team. They also highlighted the importance of empathy and active listening in leadership.

I loved the first LEAD session where we had a speaker from the Lir company come in and teach us about public speaking. This is an area where I think I have really improved over the course of the programme. I also really enjoyed the residential LEAD weekend. The activities over the weekend fostered a sense of camaraderie and allowed for the exchange of diverse ideas and

perspectives. This aspect differed from my initial expectations, as I had anticipated a more individualistic approach to leadership training. Instead, the programme really emphasised the collective nature of effective leadership.

The programme taught me valuable lessons about communicating ideas and engaging with diverse groups. I learned that effective communication involves active listening, understanding non-verbal cues, and being receptive to feedback. Engaging with young people, and my fellow students from different cultural and professional backgrounds enriched my perspective and underscored the importance of inclusivity in leadership.

I believe my leadership style, which emphasises empathy and collaboration, contributes significantly to group settings. By fostering an inclusive environment where everyone feels valued, I have been able to encourage open dialogue and collective problem-solving. This approach not only enhances team cohesion but also drives more innovative and effective solutions.

Networking as a Laidlaw Scholar has been an enriching experience. I had previously never gotten the opportunity to network, and it was very daunting at the start. However, over the course of the two years, the Laidlaw programme has given me so many networking opportunities that it has taken away my nervousness towards networking, and allowed me to meet new people with similar interests to me. Engaging with peers, mentors, and industry leaders provided valuable insights and forged connections that will be beneficial in my future endeavours. I particularly enjoyed getting the opportunity to network at the Laidlaw conference which was luckily hosted in Trinity this year.

Moving forward, I aim to further develop my strategic thinking and resilience in leadership. While the programme has equipped me with a solid foundation, I recognize the need to continually adapt and evolve. Enhancing my ability to anticipate and navigate complex challenges will be crucial in driving long-term impact in my future leadership roles and personal life.

My current perspective on good leadership centres around authenticity, empathy, and the ability to inspire and empower others. A good leader is someone who leads by example, fosters a supportive and inclusive environment, and is committed to continuous learning and growth. This understanding has been shaped by both the theoretical and practical experiences gained through the Laidlaw Programme.

I believe I have evolved into a more empathetic and collaborative leader. Initially, my leadership approach was more direct and focused on achieving specific outcomes. Now, I prioritise building strong relationships, understanding the needs and motivations of others, and fostering a shared vision. I think this shift has been really helpful in enhancing my effectiveness as a leader.

Throughout the programme, I faced many challenges, such as managing setbacks with ethics, trying to find a place for my LiA, and working as part of a team in a completely new environment. By using the skills and insights gained from the leadership development sessions, I was able to navigate these challenges effectively. For example, I used skills learned during the programme to network well and get myself a suitable placement. I also worked with my research supervisor to change around my dates, and continue to work on my research project when the ethics approval came through.

The project experiences in both summers were invaluable in reinforcing my leadership learning. The practical application of the leadership skills in my LiA provided a deeper understanding of the complexities and nuances of effective leadership. These experiences highlighted the importance of adaptability, cultural humility, and ethical considerations in driving impactful change.

The leadership development training was instrumental in shaping my approach to leadership. The sessions on cultural humility, ethical leadership, and strategic thinking provided essential tools and frameworks that I applied in my projects. The emphasis on self-reflection and continuous improvement was particularly impactful, fostering a growth mindset that I will carry forward.

I recommend that the Laidlaw Programme continue to emphasise the importance of cultural humility and ethical leadership. These areas are crucial in today's diverse and interconnected world. Additionally, I found that the residential leadership weekend was too far to travel down to for just one weekend. I did really enjoy it, but I think we could have gotten the same valuable experience a little bit closer to Dublin.

In summary, my overall experience in the Laidlaw Programme has been transformative. The programme has equipped me with essential leadership skills, broadened my perspective, and instilled a deep sense of social responsibility. It has been a journey of self-discovery and growth, and I am committed to applying these learnings to drive positive change in my community and beyond.