

POPPY'S LIA: LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP

HOME

LAIDLAW

BLOG

LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP: MY LIA EXPERIENCE



INTRODUCTION:

Hello, my name is Poppy Davey and I have decided that for my Laidlaw Showcase, I would compile the blogs I created during my LIA to create almost a story of my time in Ghana, reflecting every 2 weeks. Unfortunately I had to cut my project a week short due to personal reasons which is why it finishes at the end of the fifth week. I hope you enjoy my showcase and almost getting to go through the experience with me!

Before we start, it is important to introduce my project. Whilst I initially began my internship with the title of Gender Equality for Girls, it has moved beyond that to largely focusing on both Gender Equality for Girls and the Justice, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion internships. Before I talk about how my internship has progressed, it is vital to reflect on the initial plan my LIA was taking. My project aimed to empower young women and girls to break generational cycles of poverty through teaching them about their rights and potential. In doing so, it hopes to break cultural and societal constraints limiting their opportunities. This project is important because whilst Ghana has seen rapid transformation and improvement in girls' access to education in the last decades, with it being placed 7th for all Sub-Saharan Africa on gender parity in education in 2019, this score remained 61%, showcasing the large amount of change that still needs to occur.



WEEK 1 + 2: NEW STARTS

Hi all, I have now completed two weeks of my leadership-in-action and wanted to reflect on the project so far.

Upon arriving in Ghana, it was initially a very overwhelming experience. Not only was I landing in a completely new environment with few international tourists, but it was also night-time which seemed to escalate my anxieties. We quickly got through immigration and before I knew it, I was waking up the following day, ready to meet the GVI staff. That first proper day felt like I had lived a hundred different lives with the car journey to my base camp starting to introduce me to the way-of-life before arriving and undergoing lots of training – both regarding cultural considerations and how to remain safe. The rest of my training surrounded a community tour as well as learning about the projects undertaken at GVI Ghana, emphasising the flexibility in our project options. The community tour was incredibly eye-opening and reflected a more extreme level of deprivation and poverty than I expected. Alongside this, the first proper week I was here largely focused on teacher training, visiting the 6 partner schools, alongside shadowing other volunteers and interns to get a better idea on how the classes operate.

Since when I arrived there was only 3 other volunteers, we embarked on a 4 night trip to Cape Coast and Busua. Providing a nice break from the extensive training through the week, I found both the Cape Coast Slave Castle and Elmina Slave Castle particularly informative. Learning about this historical influence really provided the foundations for understanding the cultural context in Ghana. Alongside this, Busua was a really enjoyable trip, allowing me to get closer to the other participants.

Furthermore, upon arriving back to base, I got involved in numerous projects including book club, menstrual health and sexual reproductive health, allowing me to further consolidate my plans for the continuation of my internship. Learning about the different program options, forced me to decide the route I wanted my project to take. After reflecting, I decided I was best fit using my legal expertise to lead the Civic Engagement and Human Rights project, introducing the kids to how they can interact with governance and the legal system. Therefore, the rest of the week surrounded starting to consolidate lesson plans and preparing for the following week where I would start leading this project in numerous partner schools.

For my second weekend in Ghana, the volunteers and I spent the night in Accra, exploring the cultural sites of the Independence Square, Kwame Nkrumah memorial museum and the famous Arts Market. I really enjoyed getting to soak up more of the Ghanaian culture and learn more about the beautiful country I was spending the next month in.

Moreover, I am really looking forward to the next month in Ghana, both learning more about the country, creating positive impact on the community and improving my leadership skills.



WEEK 3 + 4: FINDING MY GROOVE

The past 2 weeks of volunteering have been incredibly enjoyable. I finally started to get some ownership over the work I was doing, was able to exercise leadership skills and felt much more comfortable and settled at base.

The past two weeks, my role consolidated into being the lead on Girl Guides and Menstrual Health and getting the opportunity to create my own project called 'Human Rights and Fundamental Freedom's'. A new set of volunteers had arrived on the third Saturday, whom were all lovely, and I got to experience the excitement of being one of the 'senior' volunteers who was familiar with how everything was ran.

So onto my classes, all of which I loved! Girl Guides was so much fun. The classes were kind-of chaotic but it was an organised chaos I loved. We did these classes at 2 partner schools called Southern Belt and Presby. With Southern Belt for example, the way the classes worked was that we had like 100 girls who all come outside for the class. Before we start the teaching stuff, they all stand in a circle and sing and dance their Girl Guides songs. Then we get started on the teaching! Since I was the lead, I got to create the lesson plans and after looking at what had already been covered, I realised there seemed to be a gap in how leadership skills were not taught. Therefore, for the two lesson plans I was doing these weeks, I decided I wanted to focus on the lessons I had learned during my leadership training as part of the Laidlaw Scholarship, using the topics of Teamwork and Assertive Communication and creating interactive lessons. The girls were so interested and loved the activities created that were based around role-playing. It was beautiful to see how much of a positive and uplifting environment it was.

As for my lead on the menstrual health project, this felt like a really important and informative topic for the girls. It was super special to see overtime how much confidence they gained when talking about things like periods. An insightful idea I got to continue was the confidential questions aspect of the lesson. The girls would write down their questions on sheets of paper and we would take them away write the answers and return them the following lesson. I really liked this because it allowed the girls to ask questions, they wouldn't feel comfortable asking in a large group. Additionally, it is worth noting how during this project navigating the cultural considerations was quite difficult, especially when questions regarding sexual intercourse arose.

Also, I got to create my own 3 week project called Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. As the staff leader of educational projects, this new teaching avenue required extensive conversations with Ebi in order to ensure it was both culturally considerate and accessible. The project was split into the following sessions:

1. Freedom of Expression
2. Freedom of Thought and Belief and Freedom of Religion
3. Freedom from Discrimination

I taught this project at 3 partner schools called St Nicholas, Southern Belt and Presby and loved seeing the children actively engage and ask questions.



WEEK 3 + 4:

Outside the Internship: Other Fun Stuff:

In the past 2 weeks, I have felt so much more confident and comfortable in the community. In doing so, I have been able to enjoy my down-time much more which has heavily involved trying the local cuisine. I love jollof, red sauce, plantain and tellapia all from various local stalls, although I wasn't sure about banku!

As for the other fun stuff, my third and fourth weekend were both spent away from base in Kokrobite, exploring different parts of Ghana. In my third weekend, we all went on a 4-day trip to the Volta Region, the favourite place I have visited in Ghana. We visited Adomi Bridge, the Kente Weaving Village, alongside climbing the highest peak in Ghana and visiting the highest waterfall in West Africa. It was truly one of the most beautiful places I have visited in my life, and I feel fortunate to have been with such amazing people. As for the fourth weekend, we went into back into Accra exploring other cultural sites and enjoyinh good food. It was so interesting to learn more about the history and culture, alongside getting the chance to buy lots of souvenirs!

Reflecting on my lessons in leadership:

I also think it is worth reflecting on what I have learnt about leadership in the past 2 weeks. Leading my classes, creating a project and introducing the new arrivals to how the programme ran was my first taste of leadership on this internship. Having these roles allowed me to exercise leadership skills and taught me that I actually enjoy taking on the role of leader which is something I didn't fully expect because I often struggle being more assertive and making decisions. But I realised that when I am passionate about something, the decision making came more easily and the role felt more comfortable.

The most pivotal thing I learnt first had was that when working with others, even if the product is something that the leader created independently, their role is not to micromanage. Being a good leader encompasses far more than creating the product but rather finds its foundation in strong interpersonal and teamwork skills. Therefore, when the new arrivals came to support me teaching my project, I found it important to take a step back and really allow them to teach and have their own independence with the material, whilst I oversaw and facilitated the class. Although I initially struggled releasing control, especially when I had put so much effort into the plans, this really helped the new arrivals learn as well as giving me a change to exhibit the leadership skills I want to emanate. These surround being strong leader who prioritises the group above herself.



WEEK 5: THE SAD GOODBYE

Unfortunately, I had to leave my internship a week early due to unforeseen personal reasons and so rather than this blog being week 5 and 6, it is my final week update!

The final week of volunteering was my favourite. I felt comfortable both in my role and the community and loved getting to introduce the new arrivals to Kokrobite and the partner schools. The new arrivals were the largest group there has been since I was in Ghana with 20 new people arriving. It was the busiest the volunteer base had been which was initially a bit overwhelming, but as one of the longest standing volunteers I ended up falling into a position of leadership quite quickly. I really enjoyed this because I felt comfortable in my role, knew what was expected of me and understood how the community worked. It was super nice to be the supportive person for the new volunteers and someone that any questions can get asked to. I couldn't believe that I had been there for a month and was nearing the end of my time in Ghana. All I wanted to do was slow time down.

I really enjoyed my classes and feeling like I was able to make an impact and positive contribution having fully understood my role. This was also assisted by how having learnt about the community more, I better understood how positive and sustainable impact could occur. To do a breakdown of my classes for my final week, I partook in 3 menstrual health classes, a Girl Guides session at Southern Belt, 3 classes for my Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms classes, alongside supporting on a Sexual Health class and First Aid. I also really enjoyed feeling like I had strong connections and friends in the volunteers making me feel really comfortable and supported.

Towards the end of this week having completed their training, the new arrivals got to join us on the classes and their enthusiasm meant many wanted to join the classes I was facilitating. This initially posed a challenge because the large interest felt quite overwhelming for me to manage alongside posing concerns about causing a distraction for the kids. However, I realised this was a perfect opportunity for me to develop the leadership traits I want to emanate in my leadership style.

I realised that whilst often the problem is anxieties creeping doubt into your mind about how a something will go, as a leader you also have a level of control. The people pleasing side of me wanted to make sure all the new arrivals were happy and allow them all to join the classes. But I had to remember our training emphasising that impact comes first and how sometimes it is essential to say no. I had to put the quality of the teaching first and realise the large number of volunteers could not join whilst also managing their disappointment. Therefore, rather than there being like 5+ volunteers wanting to join me on a class, I organised a timetable so they each could attend additional classes, but it was only a maximum of 3 as each. In doing so, I was able to prioritise the teaching and ensure that the classes ran smoothly

After an amazing week of volunteering, I sadly had to leave Ghana return to rainy Yorkshire. My full reflections are written within my reflective report, but I just wanted to include here that it has been the most amazing trip and the past 5 weeks are ones I will treasure and look back on fondly forever. I feel so incredibly grateful for the amazing opportunity that the Laidlaw Foundation and Laidlaw Scholarship have given me. Marking the end of my scholarship, this whole experience spanning over the past 2 years has truly made my university experience and truly opened my eyes to the world around me and my possibilities for the future. Anyway, to anyone who has made it this far in my blog, thank you for reading and I hope my writing even managed to convey a glimmer of the beautiful experience I have had over the past 5 weeks.

