

# Life lessons from my Leadership-in-Action experience

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My Leadership-in-Action (LiA) project took place at Princess Alice Hospice, which is located in Esher, a small town in Surrey, United Kingdom. Despite having been in the UK for a little over 2 years as a student, this experience has exposed me to new perspectives and culture, beyond what I expected at first.

Although Esher is still considered part of Greater London, the atmosphere there feels completely different from that in Central London, where I have spent most of my time while in the UK. Being in Esher, to me, felt like a break from the bustling city life I am usually in. In my first few days, during the 20-minute walk from the train station to the hospice, I felt that there weren't many things to see – no shops, buses or crowds of people – the scenery that I would normally observe. However, this made me start to notice more. It taught me to pay more attention to my surroundings and appreciate the little things that are often overlooked, both in nature and within people. I observed how people interacted with each other and the world around them. From the lens of leadership, *the art of noticing* is an underrated yet relevant concept, especially in today's fast-paced world. Noticing helps us seek deeper meaning in everyday interactions, spark creativity, and develop our own unique perspectives. However, we tend to get so caught up with our daily hustle and bustle that we forget to notice and find joy in the simple things around us.

Still related to this, one thing that I learnt, which might not be commonly observed in big cities, is *mindfulness* and *slow living*. In a world where we are constantly stimulated and tend to rush things, it is sometimes important to slow down and let ourselves fully soak in the moment, taking things one step at a time. This allows us to understand our state of mind and the world around us better. Some things can only truly be felt and understood when we slow down and take time to digest.

At Princess Alice Hospice itself, I had a great time and experience. Since the first day at work, I had been warmly welcomed by the team, which allowed me to quickly settle in. I could feel the sense of closeness in the community there, where people regularly checked in on each other and always offered help when needed. There is a strong sense of teamwork, as I saw how people complement each other's expertise as a team to achieve a goal, rather than solely focusing on individual tasks. We also often had lunch together, allowing us to foster bonds and know each other better through the simple yet meaningful conversations. Moreover, what has stuck with me is their core values, *I-CARE: Integrity, Compassion, Accountability, Respect and Excellence*, which are not just a motto but are truly manifested in the hospice's initiatives and the day-to-day work of the people behind them.

Working at Princess Alice Hospice made me realise that a hospice is not just about providing palliative care to patients and their families; beyond that, a hospice lives at the heart of the community, in recognition that dying and death are significant issues for the whole population. Princess Alice Hospice has many initiatives aimed at the community; for example, educational, fundraising, and community involvement activities. In doing this, many departments are involved, which I noticed as I toured around the hospice and read the signs in front of the office rooms. Aside from working on their dedicated duties, these departments also work cross-functionally, making me realise the significance of interconnectedness and collaboration for the operation and success of organisations as a whole in accomplishing their vision. Often, collaboration goes beyond an organisation internally. In my last

week, Jane, my supervisor, provided me with many valuable insights regarding the leadership aspects of a hospice. One key thing that I learnt is how hospices in the local area synergise in some initiatives and funding. In this modern era, the value of *collaboration over competition* becomes significant in amplifying impact in the community, which is the ultimate goal of many sectors.

Overall, although my experience was not geographically international, I still benefited hugely from the new perspectives and insights gained. Through this rewarding experience, I learnt about the value of collaboration at work, whether within the department, across departments, or even with external parties, as well as the importance of fostering a sense of close-knit community at work. Meanwhile, in terms of personal growth, this experience gave me the opportunity to challenge and explore myself by stepping out of my comfort zone and to reflect on what I ultimately want to achieve through this project. It also allowed me to be more mindful and be fully present in the moment, thinking and doing things one step at a time. All of these will be my personal reminders as I continue to grow and develop throughout my leadership journey.