

**Reflection on My Leadership Development  
As a Laidlaw Scholar**



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## **Starting My Laidlaw Journey: Developments of Mindset**

I began my Laidlaw journey with a fixed mindset, believing that success was about following a clear path and producing concrete results. In my first summer, I investigated themes of society and education, relying on traditional methods such as desk research and interviews. At the time, I underestimated how transformative this process would be. Each conversation with participants did more than provide data: it gradually strengthened my confidence, challenged me to listen carefully and actively, and developed my ability to communicate clearly in unfamiliar situations. Looking back, I now recognise these moments as early building blocks in my leadership journey. Equally important were the experiences beyond the research itself. The Laidlaw program created spaces for connection, reflection, and growth. One of my most vivid memories during the first summer is our introductory weekend trip to Hospitalfield, which marked the beginning of meaningful friendships within the cohort. As we shared our motivations and research journeys, I was struck by the diversity of perspectives and the genuine passion each scholar brought to their work. Their dedication inspired me, but it also triggered moments of self-doubt. I often felt overwhelmed and dealt with my own share of impostor syndrome, as I believed that everyone else was more qualified for this scholarship than I was. Initially, I focused almost exclusively on results, overlooking the importance of the process and the joy of collaborative discovery. Over time, however, my mindset began to shift. The supportive environment of the cohort, along with guidance from the Laidlaw team, helped me realise that leadership is not defined by individual achievement alone. It is also about listening, building trust, and learning alongside others. By the end of that first summer, I had begun to value the journey itself instead of being fixated into results, but valuing the conversations, the friendships, and the collective progress we achieved together.

## **Learning Through Leadership Training: Building Character and Perspective**

Leadership training has been one of the most intense and rewarding aspects of the Laidlaw Scholarship. I can confidently say that I have grown significantly, not only as an individual but also as a leader, thanks to the opportunities to learn alongside my cohort and scholars from across the world. A particularly memorable moment was the weekend leadership training at the University of Leeds, where I had the privilege of meeting cohorts from Switzerland and the United States. This Annual Conference provided an international perspective on leadership, exposing me to a diversity of approaches, cultural contexts, and personal stories. It was eye-

opening to see how leadership manifests differently across the globe, and these exchanges broadened my understanding of networking, career possibilities, and the paths that leadership can take in practice. During this weekend, we were also introduced to the Oxford Character Project, which reshaped my understanding of leadership by placing emotional intelligence at its core. Through workshops and discussions, I learned to reflect on how I express and regulate my emotions and how vital these skills are for building trust and connecting with others. Interestingly, I began to intentionally consider virtues that I had never prioritised before, such as humility, accountability, and integrity. These values challenged me to think more deeply about how I approach responsibility and decision-making, reminding me that true leadership is not about authority but about service, care, and authenticity. The experience did not end with that weekend. The Virtuosity app which we were then introduced, was a tool that allowed me to carry these lessons forward, providing a structured way to stay connected with my peers and to reflect daily on the characteristics of effective leadership. This combination of international exchange, character-based learning, and ongoing practice for the following weeks enhanced and made the leadership training both transformative and sustainable, leaving a lasting impact on how I see myself and the leader I aspire to become.

### **Leadership in Action Reflection: “Working with the Red Cross to advocate for Youth Empowerment Through Education, Awareness, and Inclusive Workshops” – Cantabria, Spain**

During my second summer, I had the privilege of embarking on my Leadership in Action project with the Red Cross in Cantabria, Spain. This experience was the moment where everything I had learned through the Laidlaw Scholarship was truly put into practice. I found myself in a new country, surrounded by unfamiliar faces, challenges, and cultural contexts. It was both daunting and exciting, as I was pushed outside of my comfort zone and given the chance to apply my skills in a real-world environment where the impact was tangible. I worked as part of the Red Cross Youth team and became involved in several programs, including Leisure and Free Time, Awareness and Prevention, Social Intervention and Inclusion, and Hospitalised Youth. Each project offered a unique window into the needs of society and the role of youth engagement in addressing them. I got to meet different people in these different projects, and networked with people my age, who all had a different story and experience to share, which was very inspiring to my own. This LiA has given me an international outlook and furthered my horizons in terms of career and also personal

development. I am very grateful of the international opportunity that the Laidlaw scholarship gave me as I gained so many new experiences and new friends.

One of the most meaningful experiences was working in Valdecilla Hospital, where I spent time with children in the emergency floor and intensive care unit (ICU). Supporting their parents, playing with the children, and offering moments of joy in a very difficult context was emotionally demanding but also deeply rewarding. It strengthened my resilience and mental strength, and made me realise the power of small acts of kindness in the face of adversity, especially when I see the children's smiles during my shifts, making me feel like this volunteering makes a true impact in their lives. Equally impactful was my involvement in a week-long social inclusion project, where children with special needs were integrated into classrooms alongside other children at the Santander Red Cross Assembly. During this week, while we encountered some issues, we watching them play together, and went on day trips to parks. Seeing the joy on their faces highlighted the importance of empathy, acceptance, and honesty. These moments truly shaped my understanding of leadership bynot as authority or control, but as the ability to create spaces of care, inclusion, and dignity. Beyond the projects themselves, I was inspired by the dedication of my peers in the Red Cross Youth team. Many of them were my age yet brought such diverse experiences and perspectives. Through conversations and collaboration, I broadened my outlook on international service and on the many ways young people can contribute to social change. This international exposure not only expanded my horizons but also helped me reflect more deeply on my own privileges, particularly in terms of health and opportunity. Ultimately, the Leadership in Action project solidified my growth from a fixed mindset to a growth-oriented one. It taught me resilience, empathy, and the importance of integrity in leadership. I left Cantabria with new friendships, valuable experiences, and a strengthened belief that leadership is about service, compassion, and the courage to step outside of one's comfort zone to make a difference.

### **Looking Forward: My Vision Beyond Laidlaw and How Being a Laidlaw Scholar Influenced Me and Future Me**

When I look back at the goals I set for myself in my initial Laidlaw leadership development essay, one of the areas I was most determined to improve was my decision-making. At the time, I recognised that I often overanalysed and delayed choices, whether small daily tasks or long-term commitments. I decided that throughout this summer I would not let this procrastination

persist. I aspired to become faster, more confident, and more decisive, measuring progress through time management, peer feedback, and even a personal “decision journal.” It is important to mention that by keeping a journal, has allowed me to spend time and reflect on my daily occurrences, challenges and how I came to different decisions in varied circumstances. Reflecting now, I can see how much progress I have made. Over the course of my Laidlaw journey, including research challenges, leadership training, and my Leadership in Action project with the Red Cross, I have been forced to make decisions in dynamic, sometimes high-pressure environments. For example, when working in Valdecilla Hospital with hospitalised children, I had to adapt quickly to changing situations and choose how best to support the children and their parents in the moment. Similarly, during the social inclusion project in Santander, I had to think on my feet to resolve small conflicts among children and ensure that everyone felt included. These experiences taught me that decisions do not always need to be perfect to be effective; what matters most is acting with integrity, clarity, and purpose. I also see improvements in how I manage my time. By setting clear deadlines for myself and avoiding unnecessary overthinking, I have become more efficient and productive, which has allowed me for more time to also enjoy my time in the Northern coast of Spain and reflect and enjoy nature. Feedback from peers and mentors has confirmed this shift, as they have noticed that I now approach problems with greater confidence and logical reasoning. The Laidlaw scholarship contributed significantly towards my abilities to think critically and fast and efficient problem solving techniques, and I can confidently say that I make faster and more accurate decisions without thinking on the opportunity cost or regrets.

### **Extending Impact as Alumni and Staying Connected**

Being part of the Laidlaw Scholars has been one of the highlights of my personal development and university experience. I am very grateful for everyone that I met thanks to the scholarship and also how its programs have transformed myself. This is why I believe that being an active alumni and being there for the future scholars is very important, as staying connected with the foundation will not only remind myself of all the qualities that I have learned as a leader, but also help others achieve what they want if they need a hand. Looking ahead, I want to build on this foundation by continuing to refine my judgment and decision-making under uncertainty. The scholarship has provided me with not only professional skills and leadership training, but also a network of inspiring peers and mentors who have shaped my growth in profound ways. I feel a responsibility to ensure that future scholars benefit from the same support and

encouragement that I received. One of the ways I intend to contribute is by mentoring younger scholars, sharing my experiences from both the research phase and the Leadership in Action project. I now know from my own journey that the early stages can feel overwhelming, especially when I dealt with impostor syndrome, or adjusting to the demands of research, and stepping into an unfamiliar environment abroad. Therefore, by offering guidance, reassurance, and practical advice, I hope to empower future cohorts to approach these challenges with confidence and resilience. My goal is not simply to become a good leader, but to be able to motivate others and also bring the best in version of themselves, ensuring that my choices reflect both sound reasoning and my core values of humility, accountability, and integrity. I now have greater confidence that I can grow into this kind of leader: decisive yet thoughtful, and efficient yet empathetic. Putting people first and using emotional intelligence for all my interactions, and I intend to carry these lessons with me far beyond the Laidlaw programme. Finally, I intend to embody the values of the Laidlaw programme in my professional and personal life. I would like to demonstrate that Laidlaw Scholars, do not just succeed individually but also contribute positively to their communities. I have more knowledge to volunteer in organisations to make real impact, engage in social impact initiatives, and advocate for integrity and inclusion in the workplace. I want to ensure that what I learnt in Laidlaw and its effects extends beyond its immediate circle.

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