

## **Final Reflection**

### **Introduction:**

As I near the conclusion of my time as a Laidlaw Scholar, I reflect on what a wonderful and transformative experience it has been. I have gained research and leadership skills that have shaped me, friendships grounded in shared experience and mission, and a deeper sense of who I am and the leader I aspire to be.

When I began this journey, I outlined goals for myself that all centered on growth: building the tools, skills, and confidence essential for leadership, and cultivating a leadership style that was adaptable, empathetic, and grounded in respect. I approached the programme with eagerness to learn, knowing that leadership development would demand personal reflection, practical challenges, and exposure to global perspectives. Having lived this experience, my understanding has deepened. I now see leadership not as a position, but as a service to others—placing the needs of the group above individual priorities and working toward their collective betterment.

### **Independent Research:**

Every stage of this journey advanced my goals in unique ways. Independent research taught me the importance of discipline and self-leadership; long days in libraries demanded focus, endurance, and new strategies for growth. It also clarified my academic interests, helping me discover what excites me and what does not. I was able to explore a topic I might never have engaged with otherwise: the rise of Esperanto during the Cold War. This project deepened my love of languages and their cultural value, while also strengthening my broader passion for history and global affairs. It has made me a more informed, experienced, and passionate student. Beyond personal growth, the research summer allowed me to connect with students from other faculties and backgrounds, whose experiences broadened my perspective and enriched my understanding of the world.

### **Leadership Training:**

The leadership training, workshops, and reflective exercises gave me insight into my own strengths, weaknesses, and values, forming the foundation for a more authentic leadership style.

From Laidlaw's training, I learned that there is no such thing as a "natural" leader. Leadership reflects who we are, not how charismatic we appear. What matters is trust: the trust others place in you to listen, follow through on commitments, and think critically, strategically, and with empathy. One lesson I carry with me from Dr. Sandra Romenska, is that leadership is not tied to the loudest voice in the room. A true leader is the one people turn to in moments of difficulty or when important decisions must be made—not because they seek attention, but because they are trusted and reliable.

The Oxford Character Project added another layer to my growth, helping me reflect on how character shapes leadership. I came to see temperance, integrity, and kindness as essential not only for leadership, but for life itself. In a complex and uncertain world, character provides grounding: it allows us to build trust, make difficult decisions, engage with diverse perspectives, and persevere through challenges.

### **Leadership-in-Action:**

The most recent transformative experience of my journey was teaching adult learners of English through my Leadership-in-Action project this past summer. At the English Center in Washington, D.C., I had the opportunity to work with adults whose wisdom and life experience enriched every classroom exchange. This experience allowed me to see my own leadership growth while also learning more about others. I came to understand that leadership means creating a space where everyone feels heard and valued—listening deeply, building trust, and fostering openness made our discussions far more meaningful. I also discovered the importance of flexibility: adapting plans in the moment was often just as impactful as the content I had prepared. At times, the most powerful choice was stepping back and allowing others to lead.

My project provided some of the richest lessons in cross-cultural leadership, teaching me that leadership is a dialogue, not a monologue, and that empathy and language are powerful tools for connection across divides. Through this experience, I developed both soft and hard skills: I grew as a cross-cultural communicator and collaborator, and I gained practical skills in ESOL teaching. I know these skills will transfer across many different environments moving forward.

**Final Thoughts:**

One of the great gifts of Laidlaw has been the network of peers and mentors I now belong to. Through conferences, workshops, and informal connections, I have met scholars and professionals from across the world. Learning about their research, projects, and perspectives expanded my understanding of global challenges and reminded me that leadership requires humility: the recognition that no one person has all the answers, but that we can achieve more together. These international and interdisciplinary relationships will remain resources of inspiration and support long after the programme ends.

The Laidlaw Programme has built my confidence and credibility in ways that will serve me in every future path. More importantly, it has taught me how to better relate to people: to listen first, to understand differences, and to build trust. These lessons are the foundation of the kind of leadership I hope to carry forward.

I also feel a strong responsibility to give back. As an alumna, I intend to remain active in the Laidlaw network, offering guidance to future scholars, sharing what I have learned, and contributing to the programme's global mission. The lessons I carry from Laidlaw, about trust, flexibility, and service to others, are ones I hope to pass on.

To me, leadership is rooted in kindness and vision. Through Laidlaw, I have come to understand leadership as trust, flexibility, and service to others. It is about setting aside individual priorities for the good of the group and helping others find their voice. Looking ahead, I hope to carry these lessons into my future. Being a Laidlaw Scholar has given me the tools, networks, and confidence to do so, and I am committed to giving back as an active alumna. Above all, I will continue striving to be the leader I first envisioned: adaptable, empathetic, and grounded in respect for others.