

For my Leadership in Action project, I worked with Serve the City Paris, an organisation dedicated to helping the homeless and refugees living in Paris. They conduct a range of activities, including providing food to homeless, teaching French and English language classes to refugees, and running Corporate Social Responsibility events. I chose to complete my Leadership in Action project with Serve the City Paris for a number of reasons. Firstly, from reading about their work, it was clear that they made a tangible, direct difference to vulnerable people. Their work with beneficiaries was practical and direct, which really appealed to me. I wanted to work for an organisation where I would be able to engage directly with people in need. Secondly, while Serve the City have chapters in a number of cities, I wanted to complete my Leadership in Action project in Paris specifically, as I had spent the Autumn semester of 2025 studying at Sciences Po Paris on Erasmus. I had an incredible time at Sciences Po, and I really enjoyed living in Paris. However, I remember being aware of homelessness and deprivation in the city. It made sense for me to return there to, in a way, give back to a city that I had benefitted so much from the year before. Thirdly, while I had considered joining a centrally-organised Leadership in Action project, the challenge of coming up with, and organising, a project myself appealed to me. I felt I could gain resilience and develop my organisational skills by embarking on a self-defined Leadership in Action project.

I interviewed with Serve the City Paris in February, and my application to join them was thankfully accepted. I knew my work with Serve the City Paris would involve two components: volunteer activities and self-defined 'capstone project'. Initially, I planned to conduct a project analysing the nutritional composition of the food Serve the City Paris provided to its beneficiaries, with the aim of making recommendations about how the food could be made more nutritionally balanced. However, I came up with this idea before I actually left for Paris, and it became clear that this would not be a viable option, because I was unaware of - and had not really considered - how Serve the City Paris actually sourced the food they provide to their beneficiaries. The food was mainly sourced from local cafés, who donated food such as sandwiches and salads. This had two implications. Firstly, it meant that the food received was in fact reasonably balanced, containing a mix of protein, fibre and other nutrients. Secondly, it meant that there was limited scope to change the food that Serve the City Paris provided to their beneficiaries, as it was the local cafés that decided which food to donate. As a result, I quickly realised that this was not a viable project. I decided to pivot, and began working with the Corporate Social Responsibility team, serving as a leader at Corporate Social Responsibility workshops. These workshops were attended by various companies with offices in Paris, and involved three stages. Firstly, there would be a brief information session detailing the difficulties faced by the homeless and refugees in Paris, and the work that Serve the City Paris does to help. Secondly, along with a group leader, the attendees would make sandwiches and hygiene kits to be distributed to beneficiaries around the city. Thirdly, accompanied by a group leader from Serve the City Paris,

attendees would distribute the sandwiches and hygiene kits, as well as any additional food collected from local cafés, to beneficiaries around the city. The Corporate Social Responsibility workshops served three purposes. Firstly, they contributed directly to the daily mission of Serve the City Paris, by providing large groups of volunteers to make and distribute food and hygiene kits. Secondly, they educated attendees about the plight faced by vulnerable people in Paris, and what they could do to help, thereby raising awareness. Thirdly, participating companies would often donate to Serve the City Paris, further enabling their mission. I really enjoyed being a group leader: as well as feeling like I was contributing to a meaningful part of Serve the City's mission, I liked the challenge of taking responsibility. As well as Corporate Social Responsibility workshops, I also assisted Serve the City Paris with legal research. Compliance with data protection regulations are important for any organisation, including charities. I assisted with research of EU and French law to identify relevant legal obligations, and helped examine how Serve the City Paris ensured compliance with these obligations. I really enjoyed this work. I am a law student, and I am really passionate about legal research. This work gave me an opportunity to put the skills I learn college into practice in a real-life scenario, which I found very exciting. My summer 1 research project examined human rights law. However, working with Serve the City Paris really emphasised to me that human rights law is not the only area of law that can be used as a tool for good: legal knowledge of a wide range of topics, including 'mundane' topics like EU data security directives, can be used to advance social justice causes. These two projects accompanied participation in regular food distribution activities, which I also really enjoyed. As well as giving me a chance to directly engage with vulnerable beneficiaries, I also enjoyed the sense of camaraderie among the volunteers.

I remember that at my first LEAD day, in May of last year, past Laidlaw scholars explained to us that we would likely face unexpected challenges on our Leadership in Action projects, and that we should not panic but rather view these as a part of the process, and work to overcome them. Looking back on my experience, I firmly believe that an important benefit of participating in a Leadership in Action project is the opportunity to face challenges and obstacles, yet in a supportive and safe environment. These healthy challenges provide a chance to develop resilience, while the consistent support from both your host organisation and the Laidlaw Trinity team mean that despite being challenged, you are never 'on your own', and can always access support. I faced a number of challenges throughout my Leadership in Action experience that provided opportunities for growth.

The one that comes to mind first was in fact the weather! It was very hot in Europe this summer, with severe heatwaves across the continent. Paris was particularly badly hit, at least while I was there. Temperatures reached 40 degrees, which in a city not prepared for heatwaves, was challenging. The zinc rooves of Hausmannian buildings meant that the inside of apartments were very warm. The lack of airconditioning also contributed to

this issue, meaning that temperatures inside were not much cooler than outside. Even at night, my apartment was over 30 degrees for a lot of my time in Paris. Coming from Ireland, and not particularly used to the heat, this was tough! While something like that weather sounds trivial, it did have an impact on me. However, I was able to get reasonably used to the heat. I kept the blinds closed during the day, made a special effort to stay hydrated, and where I had laptop work to do, tried to find buildings with air-conditioning to work in. There was also, to put it simply, an element of just 'getting over it': I'm very lucky to be young and healthy, so I had to remember that the heat was far less of an issue for me than it was for other people, such as the elderly or those with underlying health conditions. Upon returning to Dublin, I found the warm heatwave in Ireland much more bearable in comparison.

The second challenge that comes to mind was that, perhaps understandably, I was a bit nervous about starting work with Serve the City Paris. While the team was extremely helpful in briefing me about my roles and responsibilities, and ensuring that I was well-prepared, I still had the sense of nervousness that often comes with placing yourself in a new situation for the first time. I was a little outside my comfort zone: I'd never participated in a food distribution route before. While I had some experience living in Paris, my French wasn't brilliant either. However, I overcame these nerves simply by sticking with it. I quickly became familiar with the various food distribution routes that Serve the City Paris operated, and got much more comfortable chatting to our beneficiaries as we offered them food and a cup of tea/coffee/water. I also got more comfortable leading groups participating in Corporate Social Responsibility workshops. I knew that for many attendees at the workshops, this was their first time doing food distribution, and so some of them might have been a bit nervous or unsure themselves, so it was important for me to be confident and at ease.

The third challenge that I faced was that my laptop broke. I'm still not fully sure how it broke, but after I took it to a repair shop, I was told that the motherboard was fried. While I do not know much about computers, I figure this could have something to do with the heat. This made it difficult to continue with the legal research. While I did some work on public library computers, and some from my phone, it slowed things down significantly. I ended up doing a bit more research when I came back from Dublin in an attempt to make up for this.

Finally, I faced the challenge that many people face when moving to a new country: finding community. This was made difficult by two factors. Firstly, many of my friends from Sciences Po had left Paris, since the school year had ended. Secondly, my French wasn't good enough to meet native French speakers. However, I still managed to find community. Serve the City Paris, as a primarily anglophone organisation, provided a great source of community, and I loved attending their events. For World Refugee Day, I attended a communal meal and dance with both volunteers and beneficiaries, which I

really enjoyed. It really emphasised the strength of the Serve the City Paris community. I also managed to reconnect with a few Sciences Po students who hadn't yet left Paris, and through them, I met other friends. While I was a bit nervous before I left about settling in, I ended up finding a lovely community in Paris.

So, what are my immediate takeaways from this experience? Firstly, my Leadership in Action project with Serve the City Paris really gave me a sense of perspective, reminding me how lucky I was to be in good health with a roof over my head and food on my table, and not to have to flee my home country due to war or persecution. It reminded me how much more I could do to help those who are less fortunate. Relatedly, the experience also helped me realise that I enjoyed the kind of work Serve the City Paris does. It felt good to be able to help others, even if this help was very small. Secondly, it helped me build both resilience and confidence. It helped me build resilience by giving me an opportunity to deal with, and overcome, the challenges discussed above. It helped me build confidence going forward by showing me that I *can* overcome challenges when faced with them. Thirdly, it broadened my legal interests: I found data protection law really interesting, and discovered I may want to pursue further study of it, and maybe even eventually practice in this area.

Looking to the long term, the experience helped me formulate two broad goals for the future. Firstly, I'd like to stay involved with Serve the City or a similar organisation. This may look like volunteering with Serve the City Dublin, or another charity, maybe even Trinity's VDP. Secondly, I want to use my interest in law to make a positive difference in the world. Determining what exactly this looks like will require research and reflection, but at the very least, it could look like taking on a number of pro-bono cases each quarter, regardless of which area of law I pursue. Overall, my Leadership in Action project was a very enjoyable and beneficial experience, and I'm very grateful to have had the opportunity to embark on it. Sincere thanks to the Laidlaw Foundation, the Laidlaw Trinity Team, and my supervisor Professor David Fennelly for supporting me throughout the Laidlaw Scholarship.