

## Laidlaw Leadership Development: A Reflection

Throughout the Laidlaw Leadership Development, I took part in a broad range of activities to develop my character, particularly in relation to my future volunteering project this summer with NGO Make\_Sense in Mexico City. Firstly, we took time to identify the values we believe to be most important to us as individuals. We started with the 10 most important, and progressively narrowed this down until we landed on the value most important to us and the lives we want to lead. The word I decided upon was 'Grace', which is my favourite word for a multitude of reasons. In 1994 Jeff Buckley released his only completed studio album, Grace, before dying tragically by drowning three years later. When asked about the importance of grace to him, he responded, "Grace is what matters in anything - especially life, especially growth, tragedy, pain, love, death. That's a quality that I admire very greatly. It keeps you from reaching out for the gun too quickly. It keeps you from destroying things too foolishly. It sort of keeps you alive". I adore this quote as it truly encapsulates the importance of living life with peace at the forefront. Living through grace is not about being delicate or never speaking up, in fact, it can be the opposite. Through the leadership development days I realised that to me, valuing grace means moving through the world with kindness and openness, respecting those that are different to me and having understanding for those who act out, with an awareness that change does not occur from villainising these people, but truly understanding their behaviour. Additionally, having grace for myself is vital; when we make mistakes, it can be easy to put blame and pressure on ourselves, questioning "How could I let this happen?" or proclaiming "I should've done better", however allowing a constant level of kindness or 'grace' is the only way we can continue to lead both ourselves and others effectively without becoming self-destructive. This will be particularly useful in my LiA when things don't go to plan, as I understand that a growth mindset is a constructive one. I can accept that things can and will go wrong and use the information that failure gives me as a launching pad for future endeavours.

We later discussed the use of AI as a tool in managing risk and developing action plans. The ethics of this was interesting to consider and it allowed me to recognise the benefits of AI usage in sifting through large amounts of data in a short amount of time, but also consolidated my morals as upon hearing the presentation of AI in an exclusively positive light, I further recognised the detrimental impact of AI systems which is not yet fully

acknowledged, and the value of human creators, particularly in creative fields such as graphic design. I am interested to do further research on this social dilemma which is extremely topical right now as it may be useful for decision-making within my team in Mexico. I found myself becoming more reassured during my time in leadership development about this work in Mexico as I realised that most other scholars were experiencing similar administrative difficulties as me, for example, with the risk assessment. So, it was a valuable opportunity to relate to my fellow scholars and work with my peer that is also going to Mexico by sending emails to the NGO seeking more information and discussing our plans for our work there.

A segment of the leadership development days that I found very interesting was a talk by Dr Nikki Rutter on differentiating between volunteering and voluntourism. This was such a valuable insight into the real dangers of volunteering, particularly in a foreign country. As a group we discussed how our own volunteering can be defined and identified potential issues, for example, white saviourism, that can occur in volunteering that is less well-regulated than those central to the Laidlaw Foundation. Our eyes were opened to the terrible repercussions that can occur from wanting to do the right thing, for example, some institutions in Cambodia allow adults to meet unsupervised with children that they sponsor, which unfortunately may facilitate sexual abuse. Understanding some of these harrowing issues occurring today helped us ensure that the work we are undertaking this summer does not support such practices and provided a level of awareness of unethical activities to look out for during our LiAs, as well as who to contact if we notice anything concerning. During this process I felt relieved that this was being discussed and not swept under the rug as it is a serious problem that in recent years has thankfully begun to be addressed in more detail. It also filled me with a level of excitement as I felt reassured that my work with Make\_Sense into gender issues is not considered voluntourism, and I feel ready and willing to work with locals in the community to make real, sustainable change that genuinely helps the community.