

Hard Work Isn't Enough

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Hard work is not enough.

This is a lesson that my peers and I learned early on during our work for this summer. We are members of DGHI's Student Research Training program working under the mentorship of Dr. Sumedha Ariely on a project studying mental health outcomes of orphaned and separated children and their caregivers. These individuals are participants in just one of the numerous growth and care programs of our community partner, Udayan Care. Udayan Care is a not-for-profit organization based in New Delhi, India that works to ensure sustainable and holistic development for children and youth in 23 cities across 14 states of India.

If we were to have approached our project— especially given its virtual setting— with the attitude that hard work would accomplish anything and everything, we would have failed. We would have drowned in work only to produce incomplete, unhelpful results.

One example is the scheduling of over 200 interviews across six different participant groups. If we would have approached this task by keeping our heads down and completing everything on our own, we would have undoubtedly ended up creating a chaotic, unrealistic schedule. Communication and coordination— amongst our team, our on-the-ground interns, and the staff of Udayan care— were essential during every step of this process. It is only with these key skills that we were able to anticipate and resolve certain difficulties, such as typical school/work schedules in both countries. If we would have simply “gotten the work done” without communication and collaboration, these oversights would have developed into significant roadblocks.

Beyond communication and collaboration, this project is founded in mutual education and demands adaptability. For our on-the-ground interns, the members of the Duke SRT team along with our on-the-ground project coordinator (someone who our team selected to assist with the coordination of interviews and data collection) designed and administered a three-day training series on research ethics and how to conduct qualitative interviews. The Duke students conducted a session on IRB-approved research ethics and the project's goals while our project coordinator conducted a session on qualitative interview techniques leveraging her experience as a researcher and alumnae of an Udayan Care home. Additionally, we had to ensure our training included considerations regarding the impacts, both for our on-the-ground interns and our participant populations, of the devastating COVID-19 resurgence that India is currently experiencing. We learned from one another, pooled our skills, and adapted everything to a virtual

environment amidst the pandemic; it was only then that we were able to provide the highest quality training possible.

Expanding further, I believe a significant factor in our progress has been acknowledging our limitations. Especially as we are unable to physically be in India, we have been fortunate to work alongside incredibly insightful community partners in order to create a highly functional, mutually beneficial project. In doing so, we brought humility to the forefront of our everyday work. This has helped us to acknowledge cultural differences and “get out of our own way” by understanding our blind spots, enabling increased learning from our community partners and experts and adjustments of our project. This humility is crucial to building fruitful, long-lasting relationships between Duke team members and community partners while producing the best quality work possible.

In the end, while hard work is a *necessary* component for research, it is not *sufficient*. This work requires an intertwining of humility, immense collaboration, communication, mutual education, adaptability, and connected teamwork to create the most meaningful outcomes for our team, community partner, and individuals in the Udayan Care programs.