

# THE LEADERSHIP LAB

SEPTEMBER 2025  
NEWSLETTER



## Welcome to the Leadership Lab

Welcome to the second edition of the Leadership Lab Alumni Newsletter, our space to stay connected, share your experiences, and continue your leadership journey with those who've walked a similar path.

Taking the first step from aspiring to acting is rarely easy, it often requires self-belief, courage, and a strong community to lean on.

The Leadership Lab is here for, whether you're leading a project, speaking up for the first time, or supporting someone else's growth, every small action matters.

We recognise that Leadership isn't defined by a job title, it's a mindset. It's the way you show up, speak up, and lift others up. And, when you start to take action (however small), ambition begins to translate into real impact.

This issue includes inspiration, reflections, and practical tools to help you grow your confidence and turn your leadership goals into lived experiences. Please keep learning, sharing, and showing others what inclusive leadership looks like in action.

**"The people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do."**

(taken from Apple's 'Think Different' campaign)



**Issue 2:**  
*From Aspiration to Action;  
Building Confidence and  
Creating Impact*

# Spotlight Session

Meet Sam Sibanda – Mentee on the LLR Developing Diverse Senior Leaders Programme. This is her story of Impact and Inclusion

“Every small act matters. And in a world that’s increasingly interconnected, understanding each other’s cultures isn’t just kind, it’s critical.”



## **Mpilo Means Life: Sam is on a mission to bridge cultures and help women deliver babies safely.**

When Sam began her midwifery training in Northampton, she didn’t expect it to lead her back to the hospital where she and her two daughters were born – Mpilo Hospital in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. However a lecture on obstetric emergencies triggered a vivid memory: the birth of her second daughter was complicated by shoulder dystocia, a condition where the baby’s shoulders become stuck during delivery. It’s a medical emergency that requires immediate intervention. At the time, Sam hadn’t realised how dangerous the situation had been. “Education is power,” she says. “I didn’t know what was happening then. Now I do.”

That moment sparked a journey of discovery and action. Sam returned to Mpilo on an elective placement, driven by curiosity and a desire to understand how emergencies were managed in a setting with limited resources. What she found was both inspiring and heart-breaking. “They had ways of managing emergencies,” she explains, “but sometimes they lacked the medication or equipment to act quickly. If a woman was bleeding, they might not have what they needed to save her.”

Determined to make a difference, Sam began fundraising. “Even a pair of gloves could mean the difference between life and death,” she says. “If a mum needs a caesarean section and can’t afford gloves, she might not get the surgery in time.”

The hospital sometimes has things like gloves and antibiotics, but not always. Sometimes the husband is asked to provide these things before a woman can have the surgery she needs.

Sams first trip back was solo, but soon colleagues joined her. Over the years, she’s travelled with 17 staff members, including doctors, nurses, support workers, and even someone from the hospital kitchen who simply made tea. Together, they’ve delivered supplies, offered clinical support, and renovated wards.





Her initiative, Mpilo: The Life Project, is not a registered charity, but it's a grassroots movement that's making an enormous difference in Zimbabwe. "Mpilo means life," Sam explains. "That's what we're trying to give." The project has survived the challenges of COVID-19, which temporarily halted travel. But Sam returned as soon as she could, and she visited again this September, this time, working clinically on the ground.

Despite the impact of her work abroad, Sam is quick to point out that the need for cultural understanding is just as urgent at home. "The world has come to us," she says. "We don't need to go to Zimbabwe to help. People have migrated. Their cultures are here." She's seen how cultural beliefs around pregnancy can affect outcomes in the UK. "In Zimbabwe, I wouldn't tell anyone I was pregnant until they could see my belly, by then it's maybe six months in. That's a cultural norm. But it means missing vital early care."

Sam regularly speaks to students at the University of Northampton, using her experiences to highlight the importance of cultural sensitivity in maternity care. "Some women register late for pregnancy. It's not neglect, it's culture. We need to understand that." She recalls working with Afghan refugees, where women often attended appointments with their husbands, who spoke on their behalf. "From our perspective, that looks like domestic abuse. But it's not, it's culture. We need to ask questions before we make assumptions."

Her work has also revealed the stark contrast between healthcare systems. "In the NHS, we throw away gloves that are close to expiry. In Zimbabwe, those gloves could save a life." She's sent containers of supplies ahead of her trips, curtains, bedding, catheters, and clinical tools such as fetal dopplers. "It cost me £310 to send one drum of supplies. I do it because I can't walk away from the need."

One of the most harrowing experiences she shared was witnessing the death of a woman who unknowingly carried triplets to term. Without scans or early intervention, the woman arrived at Mpilo in critical condition. Despite the efforts of Sam and five other midwives, she died two days later. "She didn't know she was carrying three babies. She hadn't had any scans. That's the reality for many women."

Sam is compassionate, resilient, and a deeply committed to education. "I've learned so much about my own culture and others. It's changed how I communicate, how I teach, how I care." Whether she's painting hospital walls in Zimbabwe or mentoring students in Northampton, her message is clear:

**"Every small act matters. And in a world that's increasingly interconnected, understanding each other's cultures isn't just kind, it's critical."**

Sam would love to hear from you if you would like to help out with Mpilo: The Life Project, through donations or learning more about other cultures.

Contact:  
[samukeliso.sibanda@nhs.net](mailto:samukeliso.sibanda@nhs.net)

**Believe  
and  
Achieve**

Take part in the programme and go into it with a full heart and open mind. Only when you open up and let go will you benefit

Stephy Harshal -  
An aspiring Leader from DDL cohort 2

Since completing the programme, I have gained greater confidence in my leadership abilities and a clearer sense of my career goals

Sabina Esat - An aspiring Leader from DDL cohort 2

Share your appreciation or feedback in our next newsletter - get in touch [llr.academy@nhs.net](mailto:llr.academy@nhs.net)



Contact us at

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## Brain Teasers

### Anagram Challenge (Confidence Edition)

Unscramble these leadership-related words:

- C O N T A I C N F E
- E R A L E D S H I P
- C I P M A T
- N O I C I N S L U

### Finish the Sentence

Take 5 minutes to consider:

- Confidence means I can...
- One small action I'll take this week is...
- Leadership is less about title and more about...

Read more about the programmes & find how to apply on our webpage



### EVENTS CALENDAR:

17<sup>th</sup> Dec 2025 - The Leadership Lab  
Alumni meeting  
(2:00 - 3:30pm)

28<sup>th</sup> Jan 2026 - DDSL Celebration Event

9<sup>th</sup> March 2026 - DDL cohort 3 Celebration event



SAVE  
THE  
DATE