# **Personal Reflection: The L’Arche Outdoor Restoration Project**

## Introduction

This spring quarter marked my first experience working on a real-world project as part of a university course, and it was a deeply transformative journey. Assigned to the L’Arche Outside team, one of three community-based project options, we supported L’Arche USA, an organization committed to enriching the lives of people with intellectual disabilities. Our project focused on outdoor improvements: rebuilding a worn-down external shed, pressure-washing a large deck, removing moss from pathways, and cleaning up the surrounding garden space.

From the very first week of class, our project team was formed. Although we had not worked together before, we quickly developed a collaborative rhythm through structured communication, weekly meetings, and consistent engagement. These early interactions helped set expectations, build trust, and assign preliminary roles. Each of us brought different strengths to the table, which became increasingly valuable as the project evolved.

We utilized Agile methodologies from the beginning, applying tools like Jira boards, user stories, product vision documents, and sprint cycles. Our instructor introduced us to Agile frameworks early on, and this guidance helped us understand the iterative nature of project development. The planning and learning process itself became as educational as the actual project execution. Every Agile principle from backlog grooming to sprint reviews allowed us to stay organized and adaptive.

Our project began with modest means, especially when it came to funding. To address this, we launched a GoFundMe campaign spearheaded by our teammate William. Through consistent promotion across LinkedIn and the Seattle University Connect platform, we were able to raise $1,300. The campaign not only secured necessary funds but also created a stronger sense of team ownership and community engagement.

As we approached the project execution phase, we encountered significant obstacles. One of our teammates, Ash, experienced a car accident that left her temporarily unavailable. Simultaneously, our contractor went silent just one week before the project start date. These challenges initially shook our confidence, but instead of faltering, we regrouped and re-strategized. By continuing to lean on Agile tools and the collective determination of our team, we stayed focused and prepared.

On May 31st and June 1st, our team executed the project on-site at the L’Arche house. We completed every planned task and added even more improvements, like additional gardening and moss removal. This reflection paper outlines the details of our Agile process, team structure, community engagement, lessons learned, and how the experience has helped shape my personal and professional outlook.

## Team Formation and Agile Development Process

Our team was formed in the first week of the spring quarter, with members randomly grouped together. From the beginning, we focused on building rapport and clarifying project goals through a series of introductory meetings. We embraced Agile principles to guide our work defining a shared vision, drafting a product roadmap, and developing an initial backlog that included tasks such as site visits, fundraising, material procurement, and stakeholder coordination.

Using tools like Jira, Microsoft Teams, and Google Drive, we organized and tracked our progress. Our team adopted a sprint-based workflow, beginning with a "sprint zero" where we established our structure and prioritized tasks. Each sprint involved planning, execution, and retrospectives that allowed us to evaluate our workflow and make necessary adjustments. This rhythm helped us stay aligned, adapt quickly, and foster a culture of continuous improvement.

The Agile framework provided a solid foundation, especially when we faced unforeseen challenges such as Ash’s temporary absence and our contractor’s week-long silence. Despite these setbacks, the team demonstrated flexibility and resilience, embodying the Agile values of collaboration, transparency, and adaptability.

One pivotal learning moment occurred midway through the quarter when we recognized a significant gap in funding. This prompted us to launch a GoFundMe campaign and amplify outreach through platforms like LinkedIn and Seattle U Connect. Led by our project manager and coordinated by William, we divided responsibilities some team members created content, others managed outreach logistics, and all participated in promotion. This experience was a practical demonstration of Agile’s inspect-and-adapt principle, reinforcing our ability to respond to change while staying focused on our goals.

## Team Roles and Dynamics

Our team comprised six members, including a designated project manager and a scrum master. I served as both a contributor and a helper across multiple task areas, including coordinating resources, supporting with pressure washing, documenting work, and helping keep the team organized. I also took the lead on creating Gantt charts and helping with weekly assignments, ensuring we stayed on schedule and aligned with course expectations.

Jaya, our project manager, was instrumental in setting a clear vision and ensuring that all stakeholders from the contractor to the L’Arche staff were aligned with our objectives. Sean, as the scrum master, helped maintain momentum and facilitated retrospectives and sprint planning sessions. Each team member took responsibility based on their interests and capabilities.

For instance, Ash, a veteran on our team, connected us with a contractor who generously offered to build the shed for free. This gesture not only saved us time and effort but also allowed our team to focus on other critical components like the pressure washing, gardening, and exterior restoration. While the contractor and male teammates focused on shed construction, I, Onon and Ash took charge of pressure washing the front and back decks, removing moss from the pathways, and mowing the lawn. Our collaboration was fluid, respectful, and deeply focused on making a meaningful contribution.

Even though Ash had to step away due to her accident, we coordinated with her to retrieve the materials and equipment. Once she returned, her support and knowledge helped guide us in the final execution. The earlier breakdown in contractor communication turned out to be a temporary hiccup Michael reconnected with us days before the project and showed up with a professional team on the execution weekend.

## Project Execution and Community Impact

The actual project took place over two intensive days, May 31st and June 1st. We began early at 9:AM each morning at the L’Arche house, equipped with tools, materials, and a shared sense of purpose. Our fundraising efforts had successfully raised $1,300, a portion of which we used for materials, rentals, and brunch supplies, while the rest was donated back to L’Arche.

The impact of our work became tangible almost immediately. The transformation of the outdoor space was not just visual but emotional. We could see the joy on the faces of the L’Arche residents and staff as they witnessed their home being improved through the hard work of a dedicated student team.

This direct connection to the community elevated the project from a class assignment to a real-life mission. Working in service of others, especially individuals with disabilities, reminded me of the value of empathy in project work. I felt proud, not just of what we built, but of who we built it for.

## Additional Reflections

Another challenge we had to navigate involved aligning schedules for work sessions outside class. Balancing individual commitments like jobs, family responsibilities, and coursework meant we had to become flexible and accommodating. We relied heavily on asynchronous collaboration through shared folders, real-time messaging, and task tracking tools. One important lesson here was that with mutual respect and a clear purpose, even a diverse group of people with different schedules and work styles can come together and thrive.

We also learned how to delegate responsibilities according to strengths. For example, one team member had previous gardening experience and led the landscaping aspect of our project, while others with tech skills handled documentation and tracking. Personally, I found that leading through service being the one who jumps in wherever needed often motivates others to do the same.

## Lessons Learned and Professional Takeaways

This project taught me more than just how to manage a sprint or structure a product backlog. It taught me about teamwork, resilience, empathy, and leadership. I learned that no matter how much you plan, flexibility is key. The ability to pivot whether it was adding more tasks or shifting roles made all the difference in our project’s success.

Another critical takeaway was the importance of communication. Throughout the project, we used Microsoft Teams and Jira to stay aligned and updated. Having clear channels of communication helped avoid confusion and made it easier to track progress. Even small updates, like confirming a meeting time or uploading a new version of our Gantt chart, kept us all accountable and on the same page.

I also gained practical experience with project management tools such as Microsoft Project, where I created and maintained a Gantt chart that mapped out our weekend timeline hour by hour. I learned how to break large tasks into smaller, manageable units and assign them based on individual skills and availability. The ability to visualize dependencies, time constraints, and priorities gave me a more strategic understanding of project planning.

## Reflection on Community and Emotional Experience

Perhaps the most meaningful aspect of this project was the emotional connection we developed with the L’Arche community. Seeing the smiles of residents and knowing that our work made their environment safer, cleaner, and more beautiful brought a sense of purpose that no textbook could replicate. It reminded me why I chose a path that intersects technology, data, and human-centered problem-solving.

The gratitude expressed by the L’Arche team was incredibly moving. It made the sore muscles, the dirt under our nails, and the early mornings completely worth it. Knowing that our physical labor directly benefited others changed my perspective on what a "successful project" truly means.

## Application to Future Work and Life

Looking ahead, I know that the lessons I learned from this project will continue to shape how I approach both professional and personal challenges. Whether I’m managing a data analytics team or coordinating events, the principles of Agile-iteration, feedback, and adaptability will guide me.

Moreover, I’ll carry forward the importance of community engagement. It’s easy to get lost in numbers and deliverables, but the L’Arche project reminded me to always ask: who does this work serve, and how can we make it more meaningful?

This project also helped me better understand my own strengths. I discovered that I enjoy facilitating communication, keeping things organized, and jumping in to help wherever needed. These are skills I will continue to cultivate as I prepare for a career in business or data analytics.

## Acknowledgments

I am incredibly grateful to all my teammates for their dedication, creativity, and perseverance throughout the quarter. William, in particular, took the initiative to launch our GoFundMe campaign, which played a critical role in helping us raise $1,300. Onon was a dependable force during execution, working closely with me to pressure wash and clean the outdoor areas. I contributed through logistics coordination, documentation, creating Gantt charts, and ensuring our assignment deliverables were complete and organized.

A special and profound thank you goes to **FAR Construction LLC** and its owner, **Michael**, for donating their time, expertise, and materials to this project. When our group was uncertain about how to execute such a large-scale construction task, Michael stepped in not only to build the new shed but to teach us how to do it. Alongside his team, **Patrick** and **Jake**, he made the long journey to the site facing logistical challenges like a ferry ride and stayed the entire day guiding us hands-on through the building process. The fact that they took time out of their packed schedules to help our group, expecting nothing in return, speaks volumes about their integrity and generosity.

Michael's guidance extended beyond labor. He led with calm confidence, alleviating our stress, and instilled in us a deep appreciation for quality craftsmanship and selfless service. The materials FAR Construction used were top-grade, and the shed they built is expected to last the L’Arche community upwards of forty years. Their contribution not only brought this vision to life but also inspired us all with a renewed sense of gratitude and purpose. I truly believe that their efforts will have a lasting impact not only on L’Arche residents but also on each of us who had the privilege to work with them.

I would also like to thank **Gerry**, the focal point at L’Arche, for being a consistent and supportive liaison throughout the planning and execution. His openness, flexibility, and resource sharing made the process smoother and the project more meaningful. Lastly, I extend sincere thanks to our professor, **Greg**, for designing this hands-on learning opportunity and for visiting our site on both project days. His encouragement and accountability helped elevate our project into something truly exceptional.

## Conclusion

The L’Arche Outdoor Restoration project was more than a class requirement; it was a life-changing experience. It introduced me to real-world project dynamics, gave me tools that I can use in future roles, and most importantly, taught me the value of service and community. I entered this project hoping to learn more about Agile, and I came out of it with lessons far deeper than I could have imagined.

Through collaboration, dedication, and reflection, our team delivered something truly special. And as I move forward in life, I will always remember that even the most complex projects can be tackled when there is shared purpose, clear communication, and a genuine desire to make a difference.