

THE CHRISTMAS DINNER

How To Guide

Welcome to ***The Christmas Dinner***. It is an annual project founded by the poet Lemn Sissay MBE for communities to provide a Christmas Day for care leavers aged between 18 and 25.

One they'll never forget.

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About

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Welcome

This is a practical guide on how to make a dinner happen in your community. It combines all the ideas and best practice from our Christmas Dinners.

2013 - London

2014 - Manchester and London

2015 - Manchester, London Leeds

2016 - Manchester, London, Leeds, Liverpool and Oxford

2017 - Manchester, Hackney, Islington, Sheffield, Leeds, Wirral, Richmond, Canterbury, Stockport, Birmingham

We look forward to adding your Dinner to this list in 2018. In order to ensure your Christmas Dinner your team will need to make the following commitments:

- Attend ten meetings across four months to make The Christmas Dinner happen
- Find fifteen Steering Group members
- Find up to fifty care leavers (our Guests)
- Find twenty volunteers to Host The Christmas Dinner on Christmas Day
- Manage the contingency fund from The Lemn Sissay Foundation
- Attend Christmas Dinner Training in December
- Put every effort into finding presents, a venue and food in-kind
- Have fun!

*This is a
practical
guide on how
to make a
dinner
happen in
your
community.*

Mission, Vision, Values

Our Vision

No care leaver will be alone on Christmas Day.

Our Mission

We will mobilise local communities across the UK to put on scrumptious and magical Christmas Day dinners for Care Leavers aged between 18 and 25, turning Christmas into a time to cherish.

Our Approach and Values

We embody these values in all that we do:

- *Adaptability and Resilience* – Putting on a Christmas Dinner from scratch in four months is a creative and inventive process. It takes flexibility and a solution-focused attitude.
- *Courage and Commitment* – Christmas can present particular challenges for care leavers. We have the courage to be change makers and are committed to raising awareness through action.
- *Empathy not Sympathy* – We hold this value dear in The Christmas Dinner process.
- *Respect* – We have respect for ourselves and respect for others. We look after ourselves and each other from start to finish.
- *Collaboration* – The Christmas Dinner is built on collaboration. Without it the Dinner wouldn't succeed. It's just that simple. Together.

- *Celebration and Playfulness* – We celebrate the care leaver, the Steering Group member, the donor, the host, the taxi driver, the cleaner and we celebrate the day. The Christmas Dinner is a joyful process and event.

Awards

Some Steering Group members and Hosts have been nominated for awards in their communities for their contribution to The Christmas Dinner.

Congratulations to:

Lemn Sissay, who won a NESTA New Radical Award, 2016 and received the Prime Minister's Points of Light Award in 2017 for The Christmas Dinner project
Jill Abram, whose contribution was recognised at The Yorkshire PA Awards, 2017
Polly Mosely, whose work on the 2016 Liverpool Dinner was recognised at The Shine Awards
The University of Manchester Catering Team, whose efforts won a Making a Difference Award in Manchester 2017

Media Interest

The Christmas Dinner has increasingly attracted local and national press and television coverage. In 2016 Lemn Sissay and other volunteers appeared on BBC Breakfast News on Christmas Day talking about the project. Here are a couple of newspaper articles from previous Dinners:

[The Guardian December 2016](#)

[The Guardian Christmas Dinner 2013](#)

And you can read more about Lemn's vision in his blog:

[What is The Christmas Dinner?](#)

Media coverage is extremely useful, as it helps with securing venues, gifts and fundraising.

***Our Vision: No
care leaver
will be alone on
Christmas
Day.***

How To Use This Guide

***Use this Guide
as a framework to
help you
construct
your own amazing
Christmas Dinner.***

This Guide was put together following a meeting of representatives of Christmas Dinner Hosts and Steering Group members from Manchester, London, Liverpool, Leeds and Oxford in early 2017. The Guide shares what we have learned about what needs to be in place to make The Christmas Dinner a success, and offers up some suggestions and resources that can help along the way.

The strength of The Christmas Dinner is that it is organised by teams of local people who know their community. As a result, each Dinner has a local flavour, that reflects the colour and life of its host city, town or region and that means that each Steering Group will approach the task in its own way. That's fine, because we don't want you to read this Guide as a book of hard and fast rules; so use this Guide as a framework in which you can construct your own amazing Christmas Dinner.

Indeed, there are very few hard and fast rules (but where there are we will point them out).

The Steering Group

The steering group is the beating heart of the Dinner. The Christmas Dinner is not an organisation in the classic sense. But it is organised. It's a group of people who have come together from the local community with the sole aim to provide a scrumptious Christmas Dinner for care leavers on Christmas Day.

The Steering Group meets eight to ten times from September to December with a debrief in January. Before recruiting for the Steering Group have the dates of those eight meetings already in the diary so that prospective members can see what they are signing up to. The meetings are primarily to feedback on progress, seek advice, pool ideas, and plan next steps. The meetings are a place for problem solving. The Timeline (see below) keeps momentum and will serve as a gentle nudge. Sub groups can meet outside of these meetings. Connections can be made via social media. More of that later...

Finding people for your steering group

They should be diverse and from mixed disciplines: care professionals, professional creatives etc., teachers, lawyers, doctors, ex mechanics, anybody... They embody the values of The Christmas Dinner and come together to realise the vision. You'll need up to fifteen people. They can be found through social media networks or a notice in your local shop window or post office. Ask at work, ask friends. You can use these videos from [Manchester 2013](#) and [London & Manchester 2014](#) to drum up interest and gather support.

Structure of the Steering Group

A central person 'chairs' all meetings. This can be a rotated role. Do whatever works for you. It can be useful for a member of another Christmas Dinner Steering Group to be present at your initial meeting to help with the first steps. The Steering Group works in smaller sub-groups, with each group taking on responsibility for organising one of the Eight of The Christmas Dinner (see below). The agenda of each meeting is built around each group reporting back on progress, challenges, achievements, etc.

To ensure continuity and clarity of vision at least four members of the Steering Group should be present on Christmas Day.

Location of meetings

Find a room that has accessible transport links, to trains, buses, within cycle range and has parking. It should be free and relatively warm. You'll be surprised how easy it is to find a free room for a great cause.

Project Phone

It's essential to have a project phone, both pragmatically and for safeguarding surrounding referrals. A pay as you go phone from local supermarkets can be as little as £12.99. Phone cost can be deducted from your Christmas Dinner budget, See Finance section,

The steering group is the beating heart of the Dinner.

Email and Social Media

You immediately need an email address that identifies the project. You should also set up Facebook and Twitter accounts (see Communications).

One small, but important thing: You should give some attention to how you manage your email communications. In the past, we have found that there can be a bewildering amount of emails circulating around the Steering Group and this can lead to confusion and miscommunication. Once you have split into your work groups try to restrict your email conversations to those within your workgroup. Keep big questions around issues like crowdsourcing to the meetings.

Minutes

It's good to take minutes of each meeting. They don't have to be detailed, but they should note what has been agreed and make it clear who is responsible for what. Minutes can be shared on Google Drive. It helps keep the process transparent and it's a record for the future.

By the end of your first steering group meeting

- Identified who will manage communications with the Lemn Sissay Foundation. After the meeting they will need to establish contact with the Foundation by dropping them a line at admin@lemnissayfoundation.org.uk
- Agree the dates/location for the meetings
- Share name/job title and contacts
- If there are areas of The Christmas Dinner where Steering Group members are not in place, make a commitment to finding them
- Ensure someone has been nominated to buy the project phone
- Nominate someone to set up the general gmail and ensure that everyone who needs to can access the account.
- Whoever is in charge of the Referral team should operate a separate gmail account in order to manage access to potentially sensitive information
- Nominate someone to set up the Facebook page and Twitter account
- Nominate someone to set up a Google Drive (as part of the gmail address) and store the logins for accounts. Google Drive is crucial for sharing documents such as volunteer/host application forms, blank referral forms etc. It can also house this How To Guide!
- Ensure minutes of the meeting are kept and stored in a folder on the Google Drive for reference
- Nominate someone to set up a 'networks database' in Google Sheets for all networks/contacts of your local Christmas Dinner, i.e. head of social services in the area (email/contact number). This is good for thank-you notes etc.
- Ensure that, as a group, you have spent a portion of the meeting pooling ideas for each area of The Christmas Dinner (this may even aid and guide members to choose the areas/elements they wish to work on)
- Ensure the agenda is set for the next meeting.

The Eight Elements

The Steering Group works in smaller sub-groups, with each group taking on responsibility for organising one of the Eight Elements of The Christmas Dinner. The Eight Elements are:

- 11 *Guests*
- 13. *Hosts & Helpers*
- 14. *Finance*
- 15. *Presents*
- 17 *Communications*
- 19. *Venue & Design*
- 20. *Food, Chef & Maître D'*
- 22 *Transport*

01/08

Guests

The reason we are here. Referrals are known as Guests. Members of the Steering Group team managing referrals should have experience working with and for young people in care. They will work closely with the transport team and the present team.

Important: Only the referrals team and the transport team have access to the full details of the guests. The Guests team have their own email address, with a two-step verification. At an early stage in planning you need to agree the number of Guests that you are looking to invite and cater for. It is your goal.

Experience tells us that there will be last minute stampede of referrals that come from people who were not initially interested; folks will wonder why you are planning for Christmas in September. Without Guests the Dinner cannot go ahead!

The Guest Membership (referral form)

A young care leaver who is coming to The Christmas Dinner will have to be “referred”. The “referral form” is called [The Guest Membership Form](#). It tells you everything you need to know. It includes the time of the dinner, details that will inform presents etc. You can accept self-referrals too.

The Guest Membership Form is a great guide and template to work from. But here are some other things you should consider and possibly include:

- Be absolutely clear about your referral criteria before you start referring. Guests should be 18-25 and be of care experience
- There are clear cut off point for referrals. You should make a plan to do final chase around of your contacts for referrals in advance of that date. You will have to work closely with transport and present teams on this deadline.
- Guests cannot bring friends; all guests must be care leavers and must have been referred.
- First time guests get priority over guests who have attended previous Christmas Dinners

Finding Guests

You will have your own networks to draw from but previously Steering Goup members have partnered with Barnados, social services, or hostels for referrals. Cold email mail outs are not productive, so allocate time to face-to-face meetings.

How to talk about The Christmas Dinner to someone who doesn't know about it.

People will ask about the project? The best thing to do is to send them this How To Guide. Or say “*The Christmas Dinner team have over one hundred years' experience working with young people. The kitchen is accredited, the venue is checked for health and safety, all the helpers will be reference checked*”

01/08

Send people links to the articles mentioned above, or the YouTube videos from the 2013 and 2014 Dinners as they speak volumes about the project and its value.

Everyone is a recruiter!

Use your Steering Group. Whether your Steering Group members are working on transport, volunteers, presents or venue, they can **always** put folks in touch with the “referrals people”.

Data Protection

The Guests' personal information needs to be kept safe and secure and should only be accessed by the Guests team. This can be done by having its own email account, secured with two step verification. Guests data can be centrally stored on the Google Drive. Only the Guests team should have access to this information and key information will be shared on a need to know basis (the transport team will need to know addresses and phone numbers, for example). You should remember to destroy/ permanently delete any information you hold after the Dinner.

***Without
guests the
dinner
cannot go
ahead... the
section that
makes it
all worth it!***

02/08

Hosts and Helpers

The team that make things happen on Christmas Day are called the Hosts. The crew that come along and help with the set-up, wrap presents and decorate the venue (and help with the clean-up afterwards) are our Helpers. We think these are better terms than volunteers.

At least one of the Hosts & Helpers team should have previous experience of working with young people. **The Christmas Dinner is not a day to 'pity the unfortunate'. You will need to use your professional/personal instincts to ensure that the people selected to help on the Day are appropriately skilled and understand the culture of The Christmas Dinner project.**

You will also need to recruit a team of Helpers to assist with the wrapping, decorating and venue transformation on Christmas Eve. We also recommend planning for the after party tidy up in advance, which means recruiting a crew of Helpers to help clean up, pack up and make the space good after the event. You need to plan for this in advance.

All Hosts will be assigned a role/s for the day prior to arrival, preferably at recruitment stage. You can view the role description for the Host [here](#). You can find the masterplan template for the day [here](#). This will give you a taste for the day and what you will be recruiting for.

You are looking to recruit up to twenty Hosts for Christmas Day and as big a team as you think you will need for the prep on Christmas Eve and the after party clear up. Your Hosts should be a diverse mix of people of gender, ages, profession, care experience etc. Your host deadline is in the timeline. Keep a

Google Sheet on your local Gmail drive with all helpers/hosts who are interested. This information is confidential and so should not be shared with the entire Steering Group.

Take advantage of your personal and local Christmas Dinner social media platforms - Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Share the previous Christmas Dinner videos [Christmas Dinner 2013](#) and [Hackney & Manchester Christmas Dinners 2014](#). Get in touch with other Christmas Dinner groups across the country through Facebook for tips. You will have more volunteer requests than you need! You can view the role description for the Host [here](#) and of course use The Christmas Dinner values as your guide.

[Here is the host application pack](#)
[Here is the hosts references form](#)
[Here is the host code of conduct](#)

Hosts are not permitted to bring their own children on Christmas Day but they can bring them for the wrapping, prep and decorating on Christmas Eve. The minimum age of Hosts for Christmas Day is 25.

There is a mandatory training session for all Christmas Day hosts in the fortnight before Christmas. Only Hosts who have attended the training should be present on the Day.

03/08

Finance

Your Christmas Dinner is eligible to support from The Lemn Sissay Foundation. This is your contingency money.

The Christmas Dinner works primarily through the support and ownership of the community. In-kind donations all build awareness of the experience of the care leaver and encourage the community to take care of them, so presents, food, venue etc. are all donated. It's the power of networks and spreading the word about the mission and wider vision of The Christmas Dinner

The money from The Lemn Sissay foundation pays for taxis and any other transport needs on Christmas Day. It can also be used to pay for the project phone. Everything else should be given in-kind. Experience tells us that it can be done and is part of the magic!

Any money left over at the end goes back to The Lemn Sissay Foundation for future Christmas Dinners. Any money given to you for The Christmas Dinner goes into that central pot to support your Christmas Dinner next year.

The Funds

In mid-December each Dinner will receive an initial payment of £2,000. We know that some Dinners may need to draw down additional funds. If you do, you will need to contact the Foundation and let them know. Please be aware that there is an upper ceiling of £5,000 and that all payments will be subject to the approval of the Foundation.

In order to receive your contingency fund, you must partner with a local charity, not for profit or community interest company. It may be that a Steering Group member works for one of these organisations. The contingency fund is transferred to that organisation for them to manage and account for. Under no circumstances will we transfer funds into the personal accounts of Steering Group members. It's a great opportunity for a local organisation to support a team determined to do the right thing and we have found it works out very well for both parties.

You need to confirm your plans and make contact with the Lemn Sissay Foundation by the end of the first week of October. If you don't let them know by this date you may not be able to access the contingency funding.

Raised Money

All money raised, either through donations or grants as a result of you building great momentum in your area will go into the central pot and used for future Christmas Dinners, locally and nationally. This is how we help each other.

Expenses

Each organisation that receives the funds will probably have its own system for paying expenses, but you can use the template provided should you need one. You can find it here: [Christmas Dinner Expenses Template](#).

Financial Reporting

At the end of the process you will need to provide breakdown of your finances. This is so we can get a sense of how the funds are being spent, and so we can provide an accurate report for our accountants! You can get the [reporting template](#) here. **This needs to be sent to admin@lemnissayfoundation.org.uk by January 31st.**

04/08

Presents

This element is all about sourcing, storing, wrapping and saying thanks for all the presents! People on the presents team work with Guest, Food, and Host teams. More of that later. Christmas presents must be special. Our Guests deserve that.

The presents should amount to up to £250 per Guest and be gifted from your community. You're offering a way for the community to help the care leaver. Remember that the contingency fund from the Lemn Sissay Foundation is not meant to be used to buy presents.

There needs to be one **WOW** present for each guest. There maybe **fifty** or more Guests at your Christmas Dinner and they will be a mixture of ages, gender, race and some Guests may have young children. Knowing what to source will mean liaising with the Guests team so you know who you are getting presents for and what they may like.

If there are presents that need information like shoes or clothes sizes you will need to ask this on the referral forms too. **The person making the referral should avoid telling Guests that there are presents at The Christmas Dinner. The surprise is everything.**

Here are a few leads that have been successful year after year:

- Encourage companies to donate presents, by writing to them or taking to the high streets to ask them in person
- Encourage the secret Santa at your workplace to donate

presents

- Approach your local cinema for free tickets (with a plus one)
- Approach hairdressers for free haircuts (vouchers)
- Friends/networks may give £20 notes for Christmas cards
- Take to Twitter and Facebook to publicly ask people/companies
- Write to University management teams and student societies
- Approach local football teams for Boxing Day tickets
- Make use of online store Wishlists (Amazon, John Lewis, Argos, etc)

Work with your Steering Group, and other Christmas Dinner groups across the country, to make use of personal networks and contacts. Local media may pick up interest. This will gain you credibility and spread the word.

Christmas Cards

Write a personal Christmas card to every guest. Make sure the spelling of names is correct. Check and double check.

Balancing quality and quantity

Try to encourage quality gifts as much as possible, rather than a lot of cheap cosmetics. Young adults know their labels.

04/08

Avoid telling
Guests that
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The surprise
is everything.

Online Store Wishlists

Wishlists are the most effective way to get the main bulk of presents. Wishlists work a little like a wedding list, only it's for a Christmas Dinner! You can find a previous example of a Christmas Dinner Wishlist [here](#).

Set up a list of presents and share the link. Everyone in the Steering Group can share it. Wishlists are also a great advertisement for The Christmas Dinner.

Present storage

The Steering Group will need to identify a suitable space large enough to safely store hold the presents until Christmas Eve. If all else fails you hire some storage and the cost can be taken from your contingency fund.

Present Wrapping

Present wrapping is done on Christmas Eve, and the Presents team will need to make sure that they have sufficient wrapping paper, tape, ribbon and cards for all the gifts. See Christmas Eve Section.

Left over presents should be redistributed. See Christmas Day Section.

Charity

Some companies will only donate if you are a charity, so if

someone on the Steering Group works for a local charity this also adds credibility and helps with the ask.

Small Touches, Big Impacts

Individualised Christmas cards and name tags, (translated for those whose first language isn't English); one "individual" present for each young person using information obtained during the referral, (though procuring these can also be a challenge). Use your contacts, creativity, resourcefulness and imagination.

If you were coming to Christmas Dinner, what might make you feel extra special? What do young adults want?

The "Thank You!"

Send a summary of the day with a big THANK YOU to the companies and key individuals who have contributed. Thank them on Twitter. Have a rough draft of your thank you ready before Christmas Day to save time and send it out as soon as you can.

05/08

Communications

The Steering Group should use all social media platforms to post targeted call-outs for in-kind gifts, Guests, Hosts etc. Post photographs of the Steering Group meetings. It gets a buzz started.

Being visible online is great for recruiting Hosts, Guest referrals, requesting presents, food & even securing the venue. It is a way to track progress and connect with the public, for donors, and keeps everything transparent. It's a celebration of the process. It is also a tool to give thanks and show gratitude.

The Communications group will need an open Facebook group page. This will be a space to communicate with your Steering Group & the public. Take a look at The Christmas Dinner Facebook page for [Manchester](#). This will create a wonderful narrative and legacy online.

Set up Twitter to gain gifts in-kind for presents, gain helpers/hosts for Christmas Day/Eve and even nudge services that work with young people in care for referrals. Check out the Hackney [Christmas Dinner Twitter](#). Don't forget a hashtag!

Email

You need to set up an email account that identifies the project as soon as possible i.e. TCDLeeds@gmail.com. The Steering Group should all use the same email throughout the process. It serves as a place of record. Follow this [link](#) to set up your new account. To make using this Gmail account manageable make 'labels' or folders for each area/element of The Christmas Dinner, i.e. presents, venue etc. The subject headers in each and any email should pertain to the area/element. Here is a [video tutorial](#) that shows you how to do this.

Once you have labelled each area into folders you can even receive emails directly to your folders, skipping the inbox entirely by using the area in the subject heading of any email. This will make it easier to manage incoming emails. Here is the [video tutorial](#) to guide you to do this.

Once you get going, emails will arrive thick and fast! Ensure that your Steering Group responds to emails and enquiries that are generated by your social media activity. This means checking emails regularly and communicating effectively within your Steering Group. This is your job to ensure your Steering Group is responsive across all teams (not including referrals). If you see an unopened or unanswered email sat for a while, it's your job to flag that to your group. Things can get lost in the wonderful threads of gmail. It needs to be understood in your Steering Group that this is part of your role.

Hosts Team

For safeguarding and data protection purposes a separate secure email account must be set up, again one that identifies the project, i.e. referralsTCDLeeds@gmail.com. **You must have 2-Step Verification on this account**, which will be protected by a password. Follow this [link for instructions](#) to set this up. **Only the Hosts team and key people on Christmas Day should have access to confidential details of care leavers who are attending The Christmas Dinner.**

05/08

PR/Media Coverage

Enjoy the media coverage when and if it happens. But don't chase it. This movement is happening across the country.

Internal Communication

To share internal documents, access application forms, see meeting minutes etc. you can use Google Drive or even Dropbox. It is advised that it all be in the same place, centralised. Google Drive is free and very useful for this.

Previously, a steering group whatsapp group has been very useful in communicating between meetings.

***This will
create a
wonderful
narrative
and legacy
online.***

06/08

Venue & Design

This is crucial to the magic of the day. The venue team must be creative about finding an adequate space to host The Christmas Dinner and will work closely with the Steering Group members working on food.

The venue will need:

- A place that is dry and warm.
- A kitchen with a fully equipped and suitable oven
- Dining space where the dinner will take place
- Secure coats and bags room
- An office where the Project Manager for the day keeps all documents
- Presents room for the storage of presents on the day
- Games space for giant jenga, pool, board games, etc.
- Film space (for projector) where movies can be shown throughout the day
- Computer game area with couch for gaming throughout the day
- Crèche area for guests who have children (and don't forget a place for nappy changing and bottle sterilisation)
- An outside area for smoking
- Drop-off area for taxis and free parking
- A central location for guests and hosts
- A space that can be transformed and decorated into "Christmassy special-ness", with a festive feel.

Design needs

Design and decoration can transform the venue into a festive space. Think about the lighting. Can it be made into something special? The design should be a gift in itself. Small details make all the difference. A theatre designer is the perfect per-

son to lead design but anyone with a design flare can assist. Junior schoolteachers do it every year at school. The lead person should have a creative spark, design flare and a "can do" attitude. Remember we are looking to get decorations in-kind, for free. Try asking shops and supermarkets about their decorations as many take them down on Christmas Eve and would otherwise be throwing them away.

Insurance

The venue will need insurance, so don't forget to ask the venue owner whether you would be covered under their insurance. You may have to pay for added insurance on top of the venue's.

The venue is a secret. Only the steering group, transport & Guests on the day should know where it is.

07/08

Food, Chef & Maître D'

Members of the food team work closely with the Venue team, Hosts team to source the food and the food hamper for the Guests to take home. The Food team will also take the lead on finding a chef and suitably experienced Maitre D' who are willing to donate their time on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. These two people will be crucial to the success of the day, so identify them as soon as possible and liaise with them about the menu and food order. The chef will tell you what they need from the kitchen.

Work out at an early stage exactly how many people you will be catering for (and don't forget to count your Hosts and kitchen helpers).

You should aim to get as much of the food donated as possible however we have found that sometimes you may have to pay a professional chef or for an extra oven etc.

Maître D'

Service and seating is important to the feeling that we want for the guests at The Christmas Dinner. The Maitre D' runs this. It must feel like a happy Christmas Dinner not an institutionalised affair (and that takes some coordination and organising).

Food needs

The chef will work with you to make up a Christmas Dinner food order. You'll need extra food order for when people arrive and nibbles to spread around. Again, the chef will help you make this list.

Important: Remember that you will need to cater for a range of tastes and diets. The food needs to be halal or a mixture of halal. Remember to cater for vegetarians. Ask everyone if they have any dietary needs on the Guest Host forms.

Kitchen Helpers

The kitchen helpers teams will have various roles on the day that need to be listed in one document with times and roles. This needs close liaison with chef. They run the kitchen during preparation and the on day itself, so liaise closely with them.

Sourcing the Food

Food can be sourced from supermarkets, grocers, turkey farmers and cake shops etc. Use your Steering Group to pool ideas and utilise networks. This is all part of the make-up of The Christmas Dinner - the more people you ask, the more people will know about what you're doing. The aim of donating is that the community takes care of the care leavers at this time. People will believe in what you're doing! People want to give and want to care.

Left Overs

Like any good Christmas Dinner there should be food left over. You will need to source or buy takeaway trays or plastic containers for the Guests to take away afterwards. We do not want waste. There are food banks that would love the surplus, so include them in your planning and make sure someone has the dedicated role of redistributing the surplus on Christmas Day.

07/08

Food Hamper

The Hamper is a “goody bag” of staples to take home to tide Guests over the Christmas and New Year period. For example:

- Pasta
- Rice
- Baked Beans
- Tins like tomatoes, tuna, meatballs, sweet corn
- Noodles
- Meal kits
- Tinned fruit
- Tea, coffee, hot chocolate
- Jam
- Cereal bars
- Biscuits
- Chocolates
- Squash
- Toiletries toothbrush, toothpaste, shower gel, Deodorant

Ideally you want one company to provide the food for the goody bags as it makes the task easier. We have found supermarkets have been a tremendous help in the past, but approach them early. You can also approach local various food charities.

The food should be bagged in a decent quality bag; something that won't rip or tear on the way home. We have found that it is worth getting hold of hessian shopping bags are ideal. If needs be, you can use some of your budget to buy the bags.

The Hamper bag should be given as the guests leave for taxi.

***The
Christmas
Dinner is the
centrepiece
of the day***

08/08

Transport

The transport team work closely with the Guests team. To manage this section, you need to find somebody who is a good organiser; someone with an eye for detail who takes pride and pleasure in a good excel spreadsheet, feeling at ease with logistics!

This section is well suited to an experienced producer or project manager.

Finding a taxi firm

Paying for taxis comes out of the contingency budget, so work closely with whoever is in charge of finance.

You need to find a reasonably priced taxi firm that will pick the guests up and drop them back again after the Dinner. It is worth negotiating a deal with a local firm, as you will be putting a lot of business their way on Christmas Day! Local authorities have approved taxi firms. Sometimes the authority gives the cabs free to young people in their area.

Mapping the journey

The Guest Membership Forms will provide you with the addresses and contact telephone numbers of all the guests. Remember that this is confidential data for Transport and Referrals only.

Coordinating and planning the taxis is a logistics task that needs to be taken care of in parts:

1. Identify a reputable taxi firm, and negotiate an event rate.

Always see if you can get a deal and use as an opportunity to educate and advocate for care leavers

2. Identify who will need a cab from their referral forms
3. Work out on a map where everyone lives.
4. Use a spreadsheet to write down reference numbers of the cabs and all the details including pick-up and drop-off times.

Interaction with guests

Someone from the Transport team will need to phone each Guest in advance of the day to check they are okay with collection times. The Guests will also need texts for confirmation and reminders close to the day. Please adhere to the values of The Christmas Dinners and pay close attention to our [Code of Conduct](#).

This section is well suited to an experienced producer or project manager.

On the day

24 *Christmas Eve & Christmas Day*

26. *Afterwards*

27. *Timeline*

Christmas Eve & Christmas Day

The Project Manager oversees the Day, has completed the risk assessments and has the relevant numbers - from local hospital numbers, to emergency contacts. They know where the coats are secured and the timings of the day, and where each Host should be, who is first aid trained, when food is served, when clean up is scheduled, taxi collection and which hosts are doing half days/full days. They hold the list of all names and contact numbers of Hosts and Guests. They need to have been a part of the Steering Group so they know what is going on and can contribute to planning a successful day. This person needs to be dynamic, diplomatic, organised, flexible/adaptable, unruffled.

You can get a really good idea of the types of jobs that need doing on Christmas Day and Christmas Eve by having a look at [Manchester's 2016 Masterplan](#).

On Christmas Eve

Wrapping itself can take three to four hours. A whole day even. Be sure to give yourself a good amount of time, a number of helpers, and put on a Christmas Spotify playlist to keep you going! What more could get you into the festive spirit? What you will need to wrap:

- Quality Christmas cards
- Christmas bags
- Christmas tags
- Sellotape
- Quality wrapping paper
- A few pairs of scissors

Get things you don't have from a pound shop. Every present bag must be tagged, with the Guest's name and their individual presents.

Alongside the wrapping you will need a team dedicated to transforming the space, putting up decorations, lighting the tree etc. On Christmas Eve you will also want to set up all the activity stations, so that everything is ready for Christmas morning. Set-up the games room, make sure the film projector and sound system are working. Are you having a karaoke session? If so, you will need to set that up and test the equipment.

Lay out the crèche area for the children. Make the toilets look and feel less institutional by providing decent towels and nice hand soap. It's a good idea to provide free toiletries and sanitary products so people can freshen up. These little touches will make the Day feel even more special for the guests.

As well as the front of house team, there will be a group of helpers in the kitchen, getting the food prepared for the Day.

On Christmas Day

The example [Masterplan](#) from Manchester's 2016 Dinner gives you a really good idea of how the day can play out. We have found it's best to give the presents out later in the day.

***Left over
gifts***

Only Guests at the event receive presents. Make a plan for what you are going to do if you have donated gifts left over at the end of the day. Can you keep them stored until next year? Can you sell them to raise money for next year? Can you redistribute them? Have a person dedicated to managing this so it isn't forgotten in the rush of the day.

***The example
Masterplan from
Manchester's 2016
Dinner gives you
a really good idea
of how the day can
play out. We have
found it's best to
give the presents
out later in the
day.***

Afterwards

You need to plan for the clear-up of the venue, and it is a good idea to have identified a date and a team of helpers in advance, so it comes as no surprise. There is often a lot of work to be done taking down decorations, cleaning up, returning borrowed equipment, redistributing left over gifts and food and putting things into storage for next year.

The Thank You

We are guided by gratitude. So, by way of thanking Hosts give a small gift or card to all Hosts who attended on Christmas Day.

Don't forget to use your social media to say thank-you to everyone who bought gifts or made a donation.

Send an email out to everyone who has helped in anyway, thanking them for their support and inviting them back next year.

Don't forget to set-up an auto reply on your mail dedicated mail account telling people that you will be back next year.

Finally, the Steering Group members should have a debrief meeting in the New Year where they thank each other.

***The
task
of the
Steering
Group
doesn't
end
on the day.***

This timeline is a guide. It is not the law. You haven't broken a rule if you are a few days ahead or behind it. Flexibility is important and part of the creative process. You'll need to communicate with your team between Steering Group meetings.

Timeline

Dates	Milestones
September (First week)	First Steering group meeting – See the Steering Group section for what you should achieve by the end of this meeting.
September (Third week)	Second steering group meeting - Update on progress. Pool ideas across sections. Hopefully you've found a chef, who will be able to provide a list of kitchen/food needs You should have started looking for helpers/hosts/ presents and venue
October (First week)	Third steering group meeting – Progress report back to the steering group. Pool further ideas across the sections. Ideally the venue is identified by now or by the fourth steering group meeting. Formally inform the Lemn Sissay Foundation that your Dinner is going ahead. Please note: The Foundation cannot guarantee funding if you haven't contacted them by the end of the first week of October.
October (Third week)	Fourth steering group meeting – Report across sections. Ideally venue is identified now. Hopefully you are already receiving host/volunteer and referral interest/applications and present, food leads are materialising. Real push over the next few weeks across all areas.
November (First week)	Fifth steering group meeting – Progress report across all sections. Hopefully Hosts and Helpers have mostly been recruited – identify what may be missing then recruit for specific positions
November (Third week)	Sixth steering group meeting – Progress report across sections. By now you have the presents. You have the venue. You have most of the the food. You have the chef. You have most of the Helpers/Hosts ready for training in December and some referrals.

*This
timeline
is a guide.
It is not
the law.*

December
(1st week)

Seventh steering group meeting –
Progress report across all sections. You have the presents. You have the venue. You have the food. You have the chef. You have the kitchens sorted out. You have the Maitre D'. You have communicated to all the Helpers/Hosts about training. You have all the referrals. You have you have a producer for the day. You have the taxi firm confirmed.

December
(third week)

Mandatory Training for volunteers/
hosts

Final steering group meeting –
This is the final meeting includes all the sections. By now everything should be sorted. It's a packed house and ready to go. Everything is organised done and dusted. It should be tying up lose ends and a time to plan the final stretch.

Financial Report

Jan 31st sent to
admin@lemnsissayfoundation.org.uk

*Your commitment is what makes
The Christmas Dinner happen. Your
belief in community is what makes
this happen. Your determination to
make a difference is what makes this
happen. Your perseverance is what
makes this happen. **Thank you**
for everything. In making this
Christmas Dinner you are turning
what can be a deeply isolating
and distressful day into a day of
joy and true community.*

- Lemn SissayMBE