



THE CHRISTMAS DINNER

HOW TO GUIDE 2025



About This Guide

This is a practical guide on how to make a Christmas Dinner happen on Christmas Day for Care Leavers aged 18 – 25.

Each Christmas Dinner is an independent project supported by The Gold from the Stone Foundation. Over 10 years there have been 130 Christmas dinners in over 35 locations across the UK reaching 7500 care leavers.

Our vision is a society which cares equally for all people

Our mission is to ensure no care leavers feels alone on *Christmas Day*

Our values are community, creativity, care, collaboration and change



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You can find additional files and resources that can help you in the online resources folder:

www.goldfromthestone.org.uk/resources



Set up a Steering Group

The Steering Group is the beating heart

Bring a group of people together to organise the dinner. This is key to a successful dinner. People from mixed disciplines: unemployed, self employed, professional creatives: anybody who wants to get on board for the winter adventure. You'll need up to 15 people. Start mentioning it to people. Find others through social media networks. Here is an example post.



"Please share: I am organising a Christmas Dinner for care leavers between 18 - 25. I can't do it without you. Join me at our first meeting. All movements start with two people. Take a look at the website to see how it works."

The Steering Group meets eight to ten times from September to December with a debrief in January. At least four members of the Steering Group should be present on Christmas Day.

It's good to take minutes of each meeting. In the next section you will see the eight elements which make up the Christmas Dinners. Keep all the minutes on a Google drive. It helps keep the process transparent and recorded. If you have any questions after the meeting you can contact us at the Foundation. Make sure we have your contact details so we can add you to the contact list.

Eight elements:

1. **Guests**
2. **Hosts & Helpers**
3. **Finance & Fundraising**
4. **Presents**
5. **Communications**
6. **Venue & Design**
7. **Food, Chef & Maître D'**
8. **Transport**



The Eight Elements

1. Guests

At the earliest stage in planning you need to agree the number of Guests that you are looking to invite and cater for. Do not aim low out of fear. Aim high out of aspiration.

At least one of the two people managing guests should have professional experience working with and for young vulnerable people.

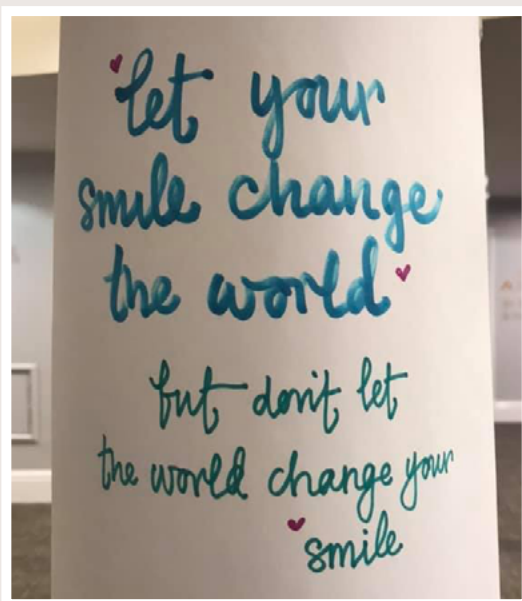
Important: only the Guests team and the transport team have access to the full details of Guests. The Guests team should have their own email address, with two-step verification.

Experience tells us that there will be last minute stampede for referrals.

A young care leaver (the Guest) who is coming to the Christmas Dinner must have filled in a Guest Membership Form (available in the resource folder). 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 via the same form.

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

- Be absolutely clear about your referral criteria before you start referring. Guests should be 18-25 and be of care experience.
- When working with other organisations for referrals, suggest a clear cut off date for referrals. You should make a plan to do a final chase around of your contacts for referrals in advance of that date. You will have to work closely with transport and present teams towards this deadline. However, we would also like to ensure there is some flexibility and consideration around the needs of young people whose circumstance may change last minute, and make space for reviewing numbers and doing last minute call rounds to those who may still be left alone. Please plan for this contingency and be inclusive, right to the final fence as much as possible
- 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.



The Eight Elements

Guests continued...

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” to reach guests.

Finding Guests

You will have your own networks to draw from but previously Steering Group members have partnered with Barnardo's, 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 and the link to the Christmas Dinner webpage:

www.goldfromthestone.org.uk/thechristmasdinner

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.

It is up to the Steering Group to make sure that you comply with all relevant data protection legislation.



2.Hosts & Helpers

You will need to recruit a team of around twenty Hosts for Christmas Day and a big team of Helpers to set-up the venue, wrap presents and prepare food (and help with post Christmas Day tidy-up).

There are some example Host and Helper role descriptions for you to adapt and use in the resource folder. They tell people all they need to know about the role and the Christmas Dinner.

Recruiting Hosts & Helpers

Make use of your professional and personal networks and take advantage of your personal and local Christmas Dinner social media platforms to spread the word - Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.

Volunteers should register their interest using the Host & Helper Registration Form (example available in the resource folder) and keep a Googlesheet on your Gmail drive. Remember to delete all the records after the Dinner.

Important: The minimum age of hosts for Christmas Day is twenty-five. Hosts shouldn't bring their own children to Dinner, but all members of the family can be Helpers.

You will be surprised by how many people offer to help!

Background Checks

The Steering Group is responsible for making sure that Hosts are appropriately skilled and experienced and understand the values of the Christmas Dinner. At a minimum, we suggest you collect references from all Hosts. There is an example references form in the resource folder.

Ideally, you should hold a training session for all the Hosts in the week before Christmas Day. Only Hosts who have attended the training should be present on the day.

First Aiders

You will need to have first aid provision at your Dinner. This will depend on how many people are involved, the type of activity they are doing, and what first aid facilities are already available at the venue. Check if your hosts are first aid trained.

If you think you might need first aid support, check with an organisation such as [St John's Ambulance](#) or [The Red Cross](#). They will be able to advise you further.



3. Finance & Fundraising

Things you may need to pay for

Christmas Dinners have thrived and grown because of the immense generosity of local businesses, community groups and individuals. While much will be donated you will still need some funds available to pay for things like taxis, last minute gifts, or a dedicated mobile phone.

To help you get started, the Gold from the Stone Foundation can make small grants to help you along. Each dinner will be assessed against our criteria. Once you have registered with the Foundation, we will send you the application form and tell you about the eligibility criteria”.

The fund is designed to bridge any gap between your local donation and what’s needed. Ideally, everything else should be donated. Experience tells us that it can be done and is part of the magic!

Local fundraising

Local donations build awareness of care leaver’s experiences and encourage the community to take care of them by giving donations; whether that be a venue in kind, presents, food, etc. All can be donated. This is the power of network building and spreading the word about the mission and vision of your Christmas Dinner.

Important: Each Dinner is its own entity, and is independent of the Foundation. Therefore, you cannot use the Foundation’s name or Charity Number to raise funds.



Finance & Fundraising continued...

A little bit about the Gold from the Stone Grant

You need to make contact with the Gold from the Stone Foundation by the 6th October to register your interest in organising a Christmas Dinner. We will keep in touch with you with updates. The Foundation will ask you to agree to some terms and conditions. There is an example agreement in the resource folder. Things like acknowledging our support with the use of our grant giving logo, featured below.

The Foundation can only pay grants to charities and not for profit organisations, so you will need to link up with a local community organisation.



Helping us out with feedback and information

In the New Year, we will ask you to report back to us about your Dinner, and how you spent the grant. This information helps us build a picture of the amazing impact of the Dinners, and helps us with our fundraising and profile raising.

We will also ask you to tell us about your Dinner's successes, and provide us with some basic data. Things like the number of Guests you served, how many presents you bought and how many times your Steering Group met. This kind of information helps us with our fundraising.

Any unspent grant money left at the end of the project is returned to the Foundation for future Christmas Dinners, by 1st February of the following year.



4.Presents

Christmas presents must be special. Our Guests deserve that. Presents should be gifted from your community. You're offering a way for the community to take care of care leavers.

There needs to be one WOW present for each Guest and a sack full of stocking fillers and Christmas essentials, like selection boxes, socks and winter warmers.

Balancing quality and quantity

Look for quality gifts and avoid asking for cheaper alternatives. Young adults know their labels. You will be surprised by how generous members of the public can be, so be ambitious.

Work with the Guests team so you know who you are getting presents for and what they may like. 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)
- Ask friends/networks to give £20 notes or Gift Cards
- Take to social media to publicly ask people/companies
- Write to local University management teams and student societies
- Make use of online store Wishlists (Amazon, John Lewis, Argos, etc)

Local media may pick up interest. This will gain you credibility and spread the word.

Charity

Some companies will only donate to charities, which is another reason to link up with a local charity or not-for-profit.

Please remember, each Steering Group is independent of the Foundation and so you cannot use the Gold from the Stone Foundation name or Charity Number to raise funds.

Quilts for Care Leavers

We work closely with the Quilts for Care Leavers project, who provide each Guest with a handmade quilt to take away at the end the Day. You can find out more here: www.q4cl.org.uk. Once you have registered your Dinner with the Foundation, we will pass your contact details on to Q4CL and they will be in touch.



Presents continued...

Online Wishlists

Wishlists work a little like a wedding list, only for a Christmas Dinner! Use your social media to share the list.

Storage

In your planning, remember that you will need a space to safely store hold the presents until Christmas Eve.

Present Wrapping

Present wrapping is done on or around Christmas Eve. Make sure that you have sufficient wrapping paper, tape, ribbon and cards for all the gifts.

Christmas Cards

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

Small Touches can have a big impact

Individualised Christmas cards and name tags, (translated for those whose first language isn't English); an "individual" present for each young person.

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 social media.



5.Communications

Experience tells us that appeals for donations, gifts and recruitment are much more effective if you use social media to get a buzz going around your Dinner.

Facebook group pages are the perfect space to promote the Dinner. Set one up as soon as possible. Post images of your steering group meetings and celebrate the process. You can use it to quickly share your Wishlists and nudge services that work with young people in care for referrals. It is also a great place to say thanks to donors.

Email

Your Dinner needs its own email account set up as soon as possible e.g. TCDLeeds@gmail.com. The Foundation can help with this. The Steering Group should use the same email throughout the process.

The email account is critical to the long term sustainability of your Dinner. You will need a separate email account for your Guest registrations, e.g. referralsTCDLeeds@gmail.com. You must keep this email account secure as it will be receiving personal information.

Only the Guests team and key people on Christmas Day should have access to confidential details of care leavers who are attending The Christmas

Dinner.

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 Communications

You will need to set up a secure centralised Drive to store and share documents. Google Drive is free and very useful for this.

Steering group WhatsApp groups have been very useful in communicating between meetings.

External Communications

The Foundation will invite you to join the Dinners WhatsApp group so you can chat with other Dinners.



6. Venue & Design

Picking the right venue is critical to the magic of the day. The venue will need:

- A kitchen with a fully equipped and suitable oven
- A dining space where the dinner will take place
- A space you can secure coats and bags
- An office where the Project Manager for the day keeps all documents
- A presents room for the storage of presents on the day
- A games space for giant jenga, pool, board games, etc.
- A computer game area with couch for gaming throughout the day
- An outside area for smoking
- An easily accessible drop-off area for taxis

Accessibility

Remember that your Dinner needs to be accessible. We recommend that you have an accessibility plan for your venue.

Risk assessment

You should follow the professional advice of equipment manufacturers and staff supervising any facilities. It is best practice to complete a risk assessment to show that you have considered any potential risks around your event.

Design & Decoration

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.

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. Please seek advice if you are unsure.

The venue should be kept a secret up to Christmas Day. Only the steering group and Hosts & Helpers should know where it is.



7. Food, Chef & Maître D'

The Dinner is the beating heart of the day; the reason we come together. It is really important to be ambitious, and serve the best Christmas Dinner ever!

Finding the right people

There are two people essential to staging the perfect Dinner: the Chef and the Maître D', so its best to identify them as soon as possible and liaise with them about the menu and food order.

The Maître D' is in charge of service and seating and setting the right atmosphere for the meal. The Chef is in charge of the kitchen.

You should aim to get as much of the food donated as possible. Use your networks, talk with suppliers, use your social media. We have found that sometimes you may need to pay for a professional chef or things like an extra oven. That's the sort of thing that the Gold from the Stone grant is there for.

Important: Remember that you will need to cater for a range of tastes and diets. Ask everyone if they have any dietary needs or food allergies on the Guest Membership forms.

Sourcing the food

We have found companies and food suppliers really want to help, where they can. People will believe in what you're doing! So be bold ask for the best.

Food can be sourced from supermarkets, grocers, turkey farmers and cake shops. Use your networks and social media. The more people you ask, the more people will know about what you're doing.

Food hygiene

As you are organising a Dinner, hygiene is vitally important. Please take great care when handling food and work to basic rules for safe preparation, storage, display and cooking.



Food, Chef & Maître D continued...

Food Hampers

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

- 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

We have found supermarkets have been a tremendous help in the past, but approach them early.

The goodies need to be bagged in a decent quality bag; something that won't rip or tear on the way home. If a local supermarket helps you out, ask for branded bags for life and share images on social media to say thanks.

Leftovers

We don't want waste. Like any good Christmas Dinner there should be food left over. Make sure you have takeaway trays or plastic containers for the Guests to take away afterwards.

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.



8.Transport

Getting Guests to and from the venue in style is really important. It's a logistics job that needs to be sorted in final run up to Christmas. A job for someone on your Steering Group with experience of project management.

Finding a taxi firm

We have found that it is worth negotiating a deal with local firms, as you will be putting a lot of business their way on Christmas Day! Local authorities have approved taxi firms, so it is worth asking them.

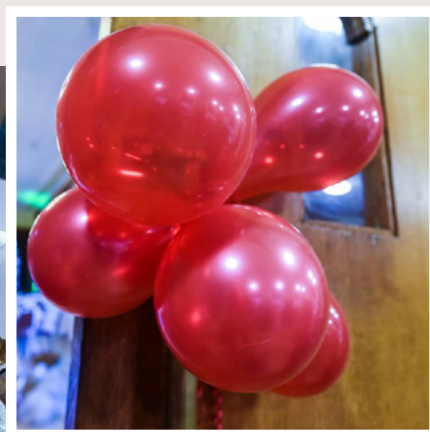
In our experience, it is worth briefing the taxi firm about the Dinner, and providing the drivers with a briefing.

Mapping the journey

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

Interaction with guests

Call 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.



Christmas Eve & Christmas Day

Christmas Eve

Christmas Eve is the preparation day when you will be joined by your team of Helpers to transform the venue, prepare the food, fill the hampers, wrap the gifts and write the cards. It is the Day when all the different elements of the Dinner come together. By the end of Christmas Eve, you will want to leave the venue knowing that the stage is set for spectacular Christmas Day.

There are a lot of jobs, big and small, so give yourself plenty of time and make sure each job has a lead person who knows what needs to be done.

Special Touches

There are little touches that we have heard about that will make the Day feel even more special for the Guests. For example, making the toilets look and feel less institutional by providing decent towels and nice hand soap. It's also a good idea to provide free toiletries and sanitary products so people can freshen up.

On Christmas Day

Christmas Day is best overseen by a Project Manager who is a member of the Steering Group. Their job it is to make sure that your Christmas Dinner runs as smoothly as possible.

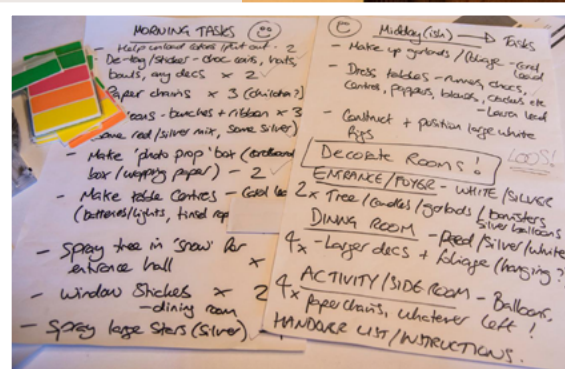
They need to have an overview of all the paperwork and tasks: the risk assessments and emergency numbers, the timings of the day, and where each Host should be, who is first aid trained and taxi collection times. They hold the list of all names and contact numbers of Hosts and Guests.

The example Masterplan from Manchester's 2016 Dinner (available in the resource folder) 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 and don't forget that you will need to build the selection of quilts into your plan!

Missing Guests

Sometimes Guests don't turn up. It happens at all the best parties. Have a plan for how you are going to check in with them, and what you are going to do with their gifts and hampers.

In our experience, it is also important to think about what you are going to do if you have any leftover donated gifts. Have someone from the Steering Group dedicated to managing this so it isn't forgotten in the rush of 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 leftover 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 any way, thanking them for their support and inviting them 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.



Timeline

This timeline is a guide, an example. 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.

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 tasks. 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 tasks. Ideally the venue is identified by now or by the fourth steering group meeting. Formally inform the Gold from the Stone 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 tasks. 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 tasks. 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 tasks. By now you have the presents. You have the venue. You have most of the food. You have the chef. You have most of the Helpers/Hosts ready for training in December and some referrals.
December (First week)	Seventh steering group meeting: Progress report across all tasks. 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 a producer for the day. You have the taxi firm confirmed.
December (Third week)	Training for hosts
	Final steering group meeting: This final meeting includes all the tasks. 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 loose ends and a time to plan the final stretch.
January	Debrief meeting & financial report: Send report and data to the Foundation by January 31st.





For any further information please feel
free to get in touch at
admin@goldfromthestone.org.uk

