



Report on The Hackney Christmas Dinner 2014

Context:

The Hackney Christmas Dinner 2014 was founded by poet Lemn Sissay MBE. Lemn began with The Manchester Christmas Dinner in 2013.

Lemn outlines his philosophy behind The Christmas Dinner:

*The Christmas Dinner is a unique affair and the core teams are the key.
They include –*

- a) People who work in in the creative industries.*
- b) Care experienced people who don't work in the care industry.*
- c) People who work in the care industry (care leavers or not)*

The central criteria for each team: Commitment and Experience. We are all experienced in our respective fields. By our actions our commitment and experience became apparent.

The nature of The Christmas Dinner is to accentuate the creative and actively disassociate from institutionalization.

The Christmas Dinner provides the opportunity for the community to care for the care leaver. This is the most important aspect.

The Hackney Christmas Dinner 2014 team were recruited by Lemn Sissay. They are:

Jane Ashley - Patron

Lemn Sissay MBE (Hon) D.litt – Writer and broadcaster, Trustee of The Letterbox Club, Coram Foundling Fellow, Associate Artist of Southbank Centre.

Bobbi Byrne - Professional Actress & Forward Foundation Partnerships Manager

Rosie Canning - Social Media Coordinator, Every Child Leaving Care Matters

Kiran Chahal - People's Kitchen

Harriet Clompus - Pediatric Doctor

Leon Clowes - Fundraiser and Founder of Leon Clowes Associates

Victoria Hall - The Who Cares Trust

Sarah Haynes - Policy and Research Coordinator

Bhavesh Hindocha - Community Worker & Filmmaker

Axa Hynes - Learning Programme Assistant, NT Learning

Robert Lowry - Online & Website Sales Consultant

Rachel McCormack - Food Writer and Broadcaster

Lisa Murphy - Teacher

Tonia Murphy - Services Manager SHP (Single Homeless Project)

Sabrina Smith-Noble - Arts Projects Manager

Louisa Wells - Head of Video Production

We are a team of professionals who between us have up to a hundred years experience of working with young people. Our aim was to provide a Christmas Day Dinner in Hackney for up to 70 care leavers between the ages 18-25 years old on Christmas Day.

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Many care leavers are sat in flats, B&B's, hostels, or are sofa surfing, away from family and living on the streets on their own at Christmas. Christmas can be a reminder of everything that they never had. It's often a dreaded day. We wanted to change that for care leavers and their children in London.

On the day, 56 care leavers aged 18 to 25 attended, along with eight of their children aged from seven months to four years old. Most were from East London, with a few who came from Croydon and South London. The biggest expenditure of the day was towards taxis making sure the care leavers got there, and that they got home safely.

Six more volunteers joined us for the preparation leading up to the day, and for the Dinner itself. Thorough vetting took place. The referrals from care leavers were managed by Tonia Murphy, Victoria Hull and Rosie Canning. All experienced professionals from the fields of charity and care.

There was a very special guest, Nitin Masood from Eastenders. The dinner guests were blown away by Nitin joining them for part of the Dinner, and for the celebrity videos which Manchester Christmas Dinner volunteer Sally Abbott put together.



Lemn Sissay produced a video of The Christmas Dinner where he merged Manchester and Hackney. Your contribution was put towards The Hackney Christmas Dinner.

<http://youtu.be/rAtzZwOuQ20>



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The money we raised:

Our original target was £5,000 but in four weeks through the Crowdfunder website, a total of £10,612 was generated from 159 backers. With special thanks to the John Thaw and Laura Ashley families, those two donations totaled £5,000 and have ensured that The Hackney Christmas Dinner will take place in 2015 as well. We really are very grateful to you for this, THANK YOU.

This is how we spent the money this year:

<i>Wine for volunteers</i>	<i>£15.98</i>
<i>Art materials to decorate space</i>	<i>£49.80</i>
<i>Wrapping paper</i>	<i>£3.00</i>
<i>2 weeks storage unit, deposit & insurance.</i>	<i>£174.52</i>
<i>Gift bags & wrap, tape, tags, napkins, cards</i>	<i>£101.40</i>
<i>Raffle tickets, balloons, cash box, bin bags</i>	<i>£14.10</i>
<i>Pastries</i>	<i>£3.20</i>
<i>Mini cab transporting food</i>	<i>£15.00</i>
<i>Takeaway pizza for volunteers</i>	<i>£64.46</i>
<i>Chef payment</i>	<i>£150.00</i>
<i>Taxi invoice – transporting care leavers</i>	<i>£2,588.29</i>
<i>Lamb, salt, oil. other foodstuff</i>	<i>£85.00</i>
<i>Restaurant Cleaning Bill</i>	<i>£100.00</i>
<i>Taxis on Christmas Day</i>	<i>£50.00</i>
<i>Christmas Decorations</i>	<i>£60.00</i>
<i>Taxi from Honey and co to restaurant</i>	<i>£20.00</i>
<i>Bread, tortilla chips, bulbs, almond milk</i>	<i>£25.45</i>
<i>Cream from Costcutter</i>	<i>£30.92</i>
<i>Misc materials</i>	<i>£66.90</i>
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>£3,618.12</i>

In raising the money, so many people helped secure wonderful rewards for people who pledged money. There were tickets for Spurs, theatre tickets, exclusive tasting and cookery for food lovers, V&A blockbuster tickets, a Twitter masterclass, garden design consultancy, arts membership, cabaret and much more.

One person pledged £500 so that a care leaver can shadow the Artistic Director of one of the UK's top children's theatres.

It wasn't just about the money though.

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Food:

Radio 4's Catalan cookery specialist Rachel McCormack ensured that the majority of food donated – it was of the very best quality, such as the cakes from *Stevie Parle at Rotorino and Dock Kitchen*, mezze and dips from Honey and Co, bread and fruit from Waitrose Highbury Corner, beer and cider from Hackney Picturehouse. So much food was given to us, care leavers had food to take away with them too.

There were mince pies from Calum Franklin at Holborn Dining Rooms, vegetables from Natoora, fizzy drinks from Sarah Belaizre-Butler, Turkey from Warrens Butcher's, Christmas puddings from Coles, cava from Codorniu.

Sharon Austerberry pledged money and she made Christmas cakes too.



The chef for the day is a care leaver himself. One of the Christmas Day volunteers wrote to tell us:

The chef himself was a young care leaver who gave a very moving and inspirational talk to the guests about his journey from leaving care to training to become a chef and ultimately taking control of his life. He did an absolutely amazing job of preparing a mountain of food to feed not only the guest but the volunteers too, whilst catering for the cultural and dietary needs of a very diverse bunch of diners. All of this in a strange kitchen with only a bunch of random volunteers to help out. The Chef was really the linchpin that brought it all together.

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Presents:

Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without presents. There were many presents thanks to Sabrina Noble-Smith and a number of people. Every single gift given to the care leavers and their children was donated.

Gifts were donated thanks to L'Oreal, Picturehouse Cinema, Record Play, Ethiopian Adoption Centre, Little Folk, Quadrille Foods, Shine Hollistic, Konfikids, Wild and Wolf, HotKey, Cordoniu, Dillon Morrall, Roundhouse and Photobox.

Presents ranged from trainers to tickets to books to beauty products. Some Crowdfunder pledgers made further pledges and so each care leaver was given some cash as well.

Many of the care leavers would not have been given presents before, or cash in a card.

Special thanks to pledger Jasmine Birtles of Money Magpie who helped secure many presents from Moccis, Good Housekeeping, Jaguar Public Relations and Bony Consulting.

The venue:

The Russet restaurant gave us their space from 23rd December to set up:



What people told us:

From organizing through to the day, there were so many touching messages.

Thanks so much for organising these, Lemn. I live in Manchester and years ago used to live on the Colville Estate in Hackney, just near to the New Era Estate. It is great what you are doing.

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Would have loved something like this when I was a care leaver, Christmas can be a sad and lonely time when you have no family and/or no home, you feel like you don't belong anywhere. This is a really great cause and although I cant afford to pledge a lot I hope my small contribution helps you reach the £5000 target in time. Have a really brilliant Christmas day! xx

First of all please allow me the moment to congratulate you on such a humane and purposeful activity over the holidays. When I left care in 1983 there was no such service and they were indeed extremely lonely and frightening nights, days and early years. Uncomfortable memories prevented me from applying for volunteering for 2014 and I channelled my desire to support into making a donation supporting the empowerment of young people leaving care.

Conclusion:

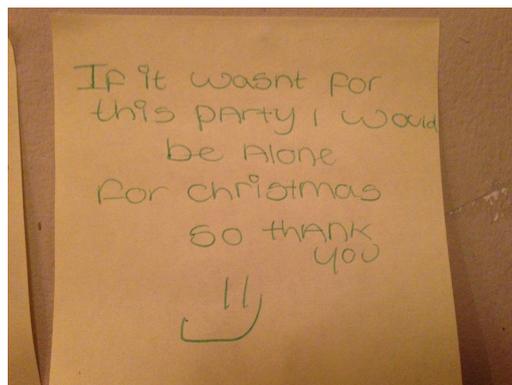
In the lead up to the Hackney and Manchester Dinners, Lemn and other care leavers were featured on Channel 4 News, discussing issues which affect care leavers.

Through social media spreading the word about the Christmas Dinners in Hackney and Manchester, thousands of people got involved, and hopefully some positive awareness – and indeed, thoughtfulness and care - was increased with people who may not have known about what care leavers face.

This what one of the Christmas Day volunteers wrote, which perhaps best sums up The Hackney Christmas Dinner:

From speaking to the guests there was an over whelming sense that was vocalised by many without any prompting and that was their real and deep appreciation to everybody for enabling them to have a very special Christmas day. One guest said "Thank you so much for doing this for us as you didn't have to" and that was very much echoed in a sense that the young guest had low expectations and were really blown away and appreciated that the day was so fantastic.

This post-it note was found on the wall after the event:



With grateful thanks to The Tope Project.