

READY STEADY GO



How to start a church based
community project

By Matt Bird



The Cinnamon Network

INTRODUCTION

Cinnamon Network makes it as easy as possible for local churches to serve those people who are most at need in the community.

Local churches have told us that in order to start social action project three make a huge difference: 1) Project Ideas, 2) Supported Volunteers and 3) Funding. Cinnamon Network helps local churches with those three things.

As a leader or activist the following pathway may be helpful as you journey from where you are currently to where you want to be in the future. It may be that in your situation some steps are already complete, or unnecessary, or approached in a different order.

Step 1. Discuss your desire to start a church-based social action project with your local church's leadership and gain their commitment and support.

Step 2. Read **ReadySteadyGo**, then start to research the priority social needs in your community and at the same time review the resources of your local church.

Step 3. Inspire people to help you start a social action project by showing them some of the short inspiring volunteer films from **Inspiring Volunteers**.

Step 4. Encourage people to take part in **Cinnamon Volunteer Training** as a way of preparing to start a social action project.

Step 5. If you are unsure at this stage, or indeed at any step of this journey, please ask the advice of a **Cinnamon Ambassador**.

Step 6. Connect with the Local Church Network in your area to see what social action projects others are running or about to start, so that you can collaborate with them.

Step 7. Attend a **Cinnamon Event** in your region or in London which will connect you with other people who may be on the same journey as you.

Step 8. Draw upon the **Cinnamon Faith Action Audit** as a way of helping building confidence and partnership with local council, police and other agencies.

Step 9. Watch some of the short films on **Cinnamon Recognised Projects** that address the priority social needs which you have identified in your community.

Step 10. Make your choice of social action project and confirm the ongoing support of your local church leadership.

Step 11. Talk to the organisation who provides the Cinnamon Recognised Project that you are interested in starting, and register for their next introduction or training event.

Step 12. If you need to, then access funding by downloading the application form for a **Cinnamon Micro-Grant**. You may also like to consider funding for non Cinnamon Recognised Projects via the **Christian Funders Forum**.

Complete planning and then start the project!

READY

A church was getting ready to launch a new community project to work with the homeless, and called a meeting with members who might be interested in volunteering, praying or making a donation. There was a strong sense of purpose; there was energy to get involved and readiness to make a start. Towards the end of the evening someone asked, “Do we know if there are any homeless people in our community?” The gathering went very quiet.

The starting place for getting involved in the community is to know the people who live there: their hearts, minds and needs.

The Bible is the story of God’s endeavour to have a relationship with humanity to the point when he chose to become human and to live amongst us. One take on John chapter 1 verse 14 says that God became man and “moved into the neighbourhood” (The Message). If we want to make God’s love known to our communities we must move into the neighbourhood and love and serve as Jesus Christ modelled for us.

There are many ways we can develop our understanding of the heart, mind and needs of our communities which may include:

- Listening to our neighbours;
- Becoming a regular at a local pub and engaging in the 'bar talk';
- If you have children, talking to parents at the school gate;
- Walking the streets and chatting to shop keepers and business leaders;
- Reading the local paper and listening to the local radio;
- Studying the local authorities strategic plan, their research and priorities;
- Finding and using readily available published data;
- Praying and seeking the heart and mind of God.

It is also important to understand the financial, building and people resources within your church. If you are working in a partnership of churches then those across the community, whether city, village or town.

The challenge is then how the needs of the community are met by the resources of the church.

Get **READY** by understanding those people who are most at need in our communities.

STEADY

As I sat in my arm chair, I visualised what the perfect rocking horse would look like. I considered what sort of wood to use, the dimensions needed and how it could be joined together. I pondered where I would make the rocking horse and what additional tools I would need to acquire. I set myself a budget and then took a trip to the local timber merchants. I didn't write a plan down but it was very clear in my mind. After two days of creating, a rocking horse emerged from my shed that has now been the love of all three of my children.

Someone once said 'everything is created twice'. Firstly, something is conceived in the mind and often – but not always – on paper. Secondly, that something is then made physically.

A church who wants to start a new community project desires a great thing, but it must be created twice. A wise church always has a community project plan. The plan may answer some of the following questions:

- What are the needs of your community?
- What are the resources and assets of the church?
- What need, or needs, are you going to address?
- Are you going to use an best practice or a bespoke project?
- What finances are required to launch and how will they be raised?
- How will the project become financially sustainable?
- What volunteers are needed, and how are they going to be recruited, trained and managed?
- What other resources are going to be needed? Such as venue, equipment etc.
- Who are the key stakeholders and how are you going to communicate with them?
- What are your next steps?

As Christians, we are at risk of believing that since we have prayed about something, it is God's obligation to realise what we have requested. However it is clear in the Bible that it is people who pray passionately, plan thoroughly and work diligently who will succeed.

Get **STEADY** by developing a plan to help those people most at need in our communities.

GO

Procrastination distracts and misdirects the church from its mission to have an even greater social impact. There is a lot of listening and talking. There is a lot of scheming and planning. There is a lot of prophesying and praying. As critical as these dynamics are, they should lead the church to action.

The author of the book of James declares "faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." (chapter 2, verse 17). It doesn't get much simpler than that. If your faith is real then it will demonstrate itself in action. Faith and action are partners who are both very much needed in the Church.

As you step out to launch your community project, you may want to consider the following:

- Inviting your Member of Parliament to launch your project – a photograph with them together with a simple new release is likely to get you into the local paper;
- Measuring the outcomes that matter the most – this will help you to prioritise the most important thing and also to secure future funding;
- Asking volunteers and beneficiaries to provide feedback – this will enable you to gather learning and continually improve the quality of the project;
- How you keep Jesus Christ at the centre of the project – to ensure that your inspiration, motivation and aspiration is always clear;
- Using your project to help others churches to start a community project - if done in the right way your success can be inspiration for others.

The welfare state as we have known it is history. There is significantly less public sector provision. There is increasing hardship within our communities. This is an unprecedented historical opportunity for the Church to step up and step out.

For some of the people in our communities, our lives are the only Bible they will have read and possibly the only Jesus they will have meet... so far! So let's not procrastinate.

Let's **GO** help those people most at need in your community.

MATT BIRD



Matt Bird is a business and social entrepreneur. He is the Creator of **Relationology** a unique approach to helping businesses grow their top line through the power of relationships. He is also the founder of **The Cinnamon Network**. He lives in London with his wife Esther and their three young children.

How it all began

Cinnamon Network began at the end of 2010 in response to growing social need, public sector reform, increasing recognition of the role of voluntary organisations and the economic cuts. 50 Christian CEOs and leaders were challenged to consider how the Christian community could deliver more local transformation at national scale and to do so at speed.

Since the early days, Cinnamon Network has partnered with projects like Christians Against Poverty, Trussell Trust Foodbanks and Street Pastors. And now Cinnamon champions over 25 Recognised Projects – brilliant church-based community projects, both big and small – aiming to provide practical support and a strong network for them to rapidly expand and grow in impact. As Cinnamon looks forward an additional focus for 2015 is growing stronger links between local churches and local authorities, the police and other agencies.

Cinnamon Network received an award from the Prime Minister in June 2013 who said, “By supporting churches to address the most pressing issues in their neighbourhoods The Cinnamon Network is transforming communities for the better.” The award reflects the outstanding work done by both the recognised projects and people in local churches who willingly give up their time on the front line.

We began life as a voluntary network, then formed a partnership with Tearfund and are now a registered charity (1156985) with its own governance.

For more information, see www.cinnamonnetwork.co.uk