JUSTLOVE.

Local Projects Handbook

Contents

> **A note on using this guide**
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> We've tried to set this out in a logical order but inevitably starting a local project will not be as simple as running through this resource like a tick list. We'd recommend reading it through in one go so that you get an idea of the scope of what's involved in starting up a project and then refer regularly back to it during the process. Make the most of your regional Just Love coordinators – talk with them about anything you are unsure about.

The Basics

We want every Just Love group to run excellent projects that have a deep and lasting impact in their local communities. We want Just Love groups to have a positive impact on their cities, we want to catalyse a cultural shift so that it becomes normal for Christian students to love and serve the localities in which they study, we want Just Love students to pioneer ministries which follow Jesus in caring for marginalised members of their communities, and we want to equip Just Love graduates to be a blessing on the ministries of local churches and charities for the rest of their lives.

Local justice projects are about action, but it is vital that whatever projects we run and whatever actions we take, we are building on solid foundations. Much damage has been done in the past by well-meaning Christians who rush into setting up local outreach projects without doing any of the research, listening, or planning that are necessary for a local project to actually make a sustainable and positive impact on the community.

The point is this: **we have to love people with both our head and our heart.** When we only do one and neglect the other, we will likely fail the people we want to love.

That is why it is vital that we start with the basics – laying out some foundations of best practice which will enable us to set-up and grow effective local projects.

Theology

Our guide to the theology of social justice gives a much broader introduction to the theological foundations of why we do what we do. There are a few points which are of particular relevance to seeking justice in our local communities.

The best place to start with thinking about matters of justice and poverty is with relationships. We are created in the image of a Trinitarian, and therefore relational, God to enjoy four dimensions of relationship: with God, with others, with ourselves, and with creation.[1] We are fully human, and glorify God, when all four of these relationships are as they should be.[2] The words used in the bible to describe this state of being in right relationships are *shalom* (peace) and *tsedeqa* (righteousness/justice).

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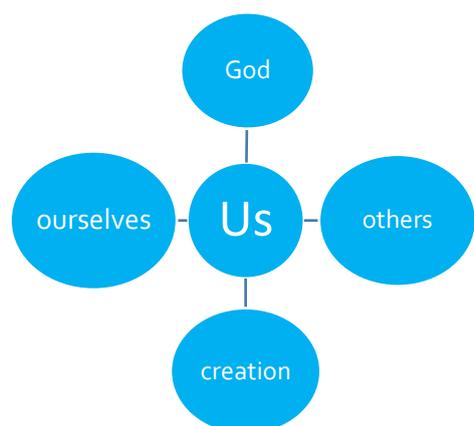
[1] Adapted from Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of transformational Development* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1999), 27

[2] All four of those relationships are easy to see in the creation narrative of Genesis 1-2, and most clearly displayed as they should be in the person Jesus.

As a result of sin, each of those four dimensions of relationship are damaged. Poverty and injustice result from those broken relationships.

This has a number of very important implications for how we seek justice through local projects.

1) **It gives us a clear goal.** The aim of any justice project is essentially the ministry of reconciliation. It is about restoring 'people to a full expression of humanness, to being what God created us all to be, people who glorify God by living in right relationship with God, self, others and creation … Poverty alleviation occurs when the power of Christ's resurrection reconciles our key relationships through the transformation of both individual lives and local, national and international systems.'[3] So whatever our local project, the goal is the reconciliation of those four dimensions of relationship.

2) **We realise our mutual brokenness**. If poverty results from these four dimensions of relationship being broken, then we are all poor in the sense that none of us experience those four dimensions of relationship at they were intended to be.[4] This leaves no room for saviour-complexes. All too often justice projects are fueled by a desire to be a hero, a rescuer. When this happens, projects tend to increase the saviour-complexes of the helper and increase the sense of inferiority felt by the helped. In other words, it does further damage to the already broken relationships, and moves everyone involved further away from peace (*shalom)* and justice (*tsedeqa*). In order to counter this, it is vital that we **start and continue in a posture of repentance**. We need to repent of our own saviour-complexes, our own need to be needed, and we need to ask God to help us to change. We need to recognize our own brokenness and think very carefully about how we avoid an unhealthy power-dynamic between helper and helped. And we need to recognise that we do not give dignity to other human beings – rather we should recognise the inherent dignity already given to them by God.[5] If the goal of justice projects is to restore those broken dimensions of relationship, then that applies to us as well as those we help. The goal is for everyone involved, together, to move closer to glorifying God by living in right relationships.

Community Development

Community development theory is a huge field and the best way to learn is by listening to people with years of experience, getting experience yourself, and supplementing that with reading and research. Here are a few key ideas to start out with:

1) **Relief, rehabilitation and development**

Relief is about giving assistance to someone incapable of helping his/herself.

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[3] Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody, 2012), 73-4

[4] Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 57-67

[5] John M. Perkins, *Beyond Charity: the call to Christian Community Development* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 90

Rehabilitation is about working with someone as they participate in their own recovery

Development is about ongoing change that moves all people involved closer to being in right relationships with God, self, others, and creation.

One of the biggest tasks of any justice project is discerning which of these is the appropriate response.[6]

The aim is always to move towards development. Relief is only ever appropriate in crisis situations, otherwise it can create dependency – leaving helper and helped further from the goal of development.

It is vital in rehabilitation projects that the recipients can participate in their own recovery.

The vast majority of Christian justice projects fall into the relief and rehabilitation categories – and as we set up our own projects we need to seriously question whether what we are doing will actually lead to development – will it lead to everyone involved being in right relationship with God, self, others, and creation?

2) The challenge of paternalism

A key principal of community development is **don't do for people what they can do for themselves**.[7] If we hold to this principle, it will ensure that development, not relief, is the end goal of what we do. It will also help us to avoid the trap of paternalism.

The reason it is so important that we don't do for people what they can do for themselves is because it disempowers those we are trying to help, and it fuels the saviour-complexes of the helpers. It treats the helped as inferior. This is what we mean by paternalism.

In just about any justice project, there are various ways we can fall into paternalism:
- *Leadership paternalism* – when we assume that only the helpers can take and leadership responsibility within the project. (e.g. leading a living wage campaign with no input or guidance from people who will be affected by a living wage policy)
- *Knowledge paternalism* – assuming that the helpers have all of the best ideas about how to do things (e.g. setting up a new project without consulting those who you are going to help)
- *Labour paternalism* – doing work for people that they can do themselves (e.g. regularly mowing someone's lawn when they are capable of doing it themselves)
- *Discipleship paternalism* – assuming that we are bringing God to those we are helping, and not allowing them to influence our discipleship (e.g. running a bible study without giving those you are helping a chance to contribute their thoughts)

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[6] Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts,* 99-109
[7] This whole section is influenced by Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts,* 109-115

We want to flee from any form of paternalism, instead, treating those we are aiming to help as children of God. We want everyone involved to journey together towards reconciling all four of those dimensions of relationship.

3) Asset-based community development

A great way to help steer clear of a paternalistic attitude is to use asset-based community development (ABCD) as part of your research as you get a project started.

ABCD is essentially about starting with questions like 'What is right?' 'What is good?' 'What skills, resources, and knowledge does this community have?' This is opposed to going into communities with an attitude of 'what is wrong?' or 'I am going to fix you.'

ABCD is not about denying that there are needs or brokenness in a community, but it is about starting by seeking right relationships – by treating those in the communities you are seeking to help as people not as projects.

As an example, we might talk to a local church leader from a particular community in our city and discover that she has a number of retired teachers in her congregation. That is a real asset! Could we could facilitate the running of a homework club in a local school with the assistance of those retired teachers? How else could we celebrate and make use of those assets?

We can, and should, also ask people what they feel the needs are in their community and what they would like to see change. Needs assessment is really important for working out what the gaps are between how things currently are and how the community would like things to be. But it's vital that we don't forget to celebrate and make use of what is good.

Going further with the theory

It is vital to have a basic grasp of best-practice in community development, and there is much to be gained by pressing deeper and making sure that ongoing learning runs alongside the projects that you set up.

In addition to the books and websites cited in this guide, it is worth exploring the community toolbox website.

Starting Up a Local Project Part 1: preliminary steps

Once some of the basics are covered, you can start to apply those theories as you think about setting up a local project. It might be that Just Love is in the early stages in your city, or that there simply are not many Christian students who want to get involved. If that's the case, then this may all feel intimidating. Talk things through with your regional coordinator. There are certainly shortcuts that can be taken and adaptations that can be made in those circumstances.

There are four initial steps to walk through:

1) Prayer

It is vital, as we explore the possibility of starting up a new local project, that we begin, and go on, in prayer. Pray for wisdom and inspiration. Pray that doors would open and strong relationships would form. Pray for pretty much everything involved in starting and running a project. As John Perkins says, 'effective ministry begins in prayer. Prayer is not a means to secure God's blessing or approval for our plans, no matter how noble or charitable they may be. **Our prayers are to tune us in to what God already has planned**. We pray because we realise that our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers. We dare not perform outside that reality.'[8]

2) Relationship Building

We've already said that poverty and injustice are rooted in broken relationships. Our attempts to seek justice, therefore, must be built on good relationships. As relative newcomers, we benefit hugely from those with expertise and experience. We need to get to know those working for churches and charities with local ministries that we can learn from and partner with. If you're unsure where to start with relationship building then read our guide. Start with people you know – maybe in church – who are well connected, and ask them to introduce you to people who it would be good to meet with. In most cities there are formal and informal networks among lots of local church and charity projects. Make the most of those – find a way into those networks and be ready to explain the Just Love vision and what we do as you meet new people.

Throughout the process of setting up and running a local project, **we need to be humble enough to invite their honest feedback and wise enough to listen to their advice**.

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[8] John Perkins, *Beyond Charity*, 169-70

Undoubtedly, there will be aspects of these existing ministries which you think could be improved, and within the context of a strong, trusting relationship you can offer your own feedback and ask searching questions so that the exchange is mutual and not simply one-directional. The aim of these relationships with church and charity workers is that we might help each other to run better projects which do a better job at moving everyone involved closer to glorifying God.

3) Listening to the community

As you pray and build relationships with local ministries, it is vital that you also listen to the community that you are seeking to help. If we want to overcome the paternalism of leadership and ideas that can restrain development then whatever projects we run ought to be run with, rather than for, the people we are trying to help. We should begin doing that before the project even gets started. As far as possible, we want to involve those we are seeking to help in the planning process. A project which the local community desire and feel a sense of ownership over, will likely do a far better job of reconciling all four dimensions of relationship, than a project which the local community neither own nor asked for.

There are many exercises that could help you to listen to the community. Organisations like Citizens UK, CTC and IJM have resources which go into considerable depth.[9]

If you are exploring setting up a project in a particular geographical area, then a good place to start is simply to go walking around that area. You could take someone who knows the area with you to point out anything that could be interesting. It is an opportunity to pray as you walk, to see for yourself and to begin to get to know an area, and potentially to create some relationships that will help in the next steps.

Remember the principal of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD). One key part of listening to the community is to learn what is good. What are the strengths? If you are looking at starting a project in a particular area, then who are the people in that community who have the energy, the gifts, or the time to make a positive change? If you are looking at starting a project befriending elderly and isolated people then are there elderly people who are particularly well-connected, or who have organisational gifts and could help with the organising of it?

At the same time as asset-mapping – exploring the strengths in a particular community – we could consider conducting needs-mapping. This happens best in the context of conversations – listening to people's concerns and fears for their community. Ask open questions. What is not right? What worries them? What would they like to see change? Who is being left out? This could be overwhelming and we are not necessarily going to fix everything. But as we listen to lots of people it might be that consistent themes come up, and this ought to influence our projects. If we wanted to start a project that addressed food poverty but after listening to

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[9] http://www.citizensuk.org/, http://www.theology-centre.org.uk/resources/,
https://www.ijm.org/sites/default/files/download/resources/Community-Justice-Assessment-Tool.pdf

people at the local foodbank it became clear that many people in the community were not confident cooking simple and affordable meals, then perhaps some sort of cooking classes would be a good project. Even better, if it emerged during asset-mapping that there were people capable of teaching cookery then they could share in the ownership of the project.

You can supplement the face-to-face listening with internet research. Especially if you are concentrating on a particular geographical area then it will be helpful to learn all about that community. Learn about the demographics.[10] Statistics should not replace the relational side of listening, but they can help to inform, back-up and challenge what we learn face-to-face.

All of this might seem like a lot of effort. And it should be. This could take months. **Although it can be frustrating for those of us who just want to start doing something right away, it is worth taking the time to listen really well** – it could make the difference between an incredible project that runs for decades, and a project which runs out of steam after a couple of months. John Perkins warns us to remember 'that programs are dispensable but people are not. Developing good relationships with your neighbors (sic) is the most important thing you can do in Christian community development.'[11]

It makes sense to try to do these listening exercises with the help of partners. This depends largely on what sort of project you want to set up (see below), but it could involve helping a church or charity to conduct listening exercises they would not otherwise have capacity for.

It is certainly worth thinking about how you will present the results of your research to partners. This will help to clarify the decisions that you make and will help to build trust and confidence that you are going about starting a project in a responsible way. This may be in the form of a report, or a presentation (quite possibly both) – find out what the churches and charities that you are building relationships with would prefer.

Although it might feel like another hurdle to jump over, presenting your results will help your team to draw together all of the research that you have done and it will give partners the opportunity to offer valuable feedback before you start to get the project going.

4) What sort of project will you start?

Another big decision to make is what sort of project you are going to start. There are four broad categories that most local justice projects fit into:

- *Pioneer* – a new project that is run independently by students.
- *Funnel* – students volunteering with existing projects run by local churches or charities.
- *Hybrid* – a mixture of pioneer and funnel – for example, Just Love students running an additional night's outreach at the homeless shelter of a local charity.

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[10] Church Urban Fund have a simple search engine for information on every parish in the country: http://www2.cuf.org.uk/lookup-tool
[11] Perkins, *Beyond Charity,* 117-8

- *One-off campaign* – organising for a particular change on a local level – for example campaigning for the university to pay the living wage, or collecting food at the end of a semester for the local Foodbank. Check out our resource on campaigning.

Each category has advantages and disadvantages, and these will all need to be thought through carefully as you decide what sort of project will work best in your community.

Pioneer projects will give great opportunities for leadership development and they give students the freedom to shape the project. But the danger of pioneer projects is that they are conducted without expertise, accountability, or structures of pastoral support, and that they replicate what churches and charities are already doing. They will generally require considerably more effort to start up and sustainability is a greater challenge.

Conversely, funnel projects are likely to be easier to start. Being under the wing of a larger organisation means that accountability, pastoral care, insurance, risk assessments and sustainability should be taken care of. Of course, this will only be the case if the church or charity that you partner with are running an effective project. Part of your research needs to be working out which are the most effective projects in the local community – which projects model best-practice and will look after volunteers? The risk of funnel projects is that students are not given sufficient responsibility to develop as leaders or feel limited ownership over the project. This will likely mean that they lose motivation and it will be hard to maintain high volunteering levels.

A hybrid project could capture the best and avoid the risks of each of these categories, but that will require careful planning. Almost all projects will require a degree of hybridity. For example, a pioneer project will be helped greatly by a degree of oversight and expertise from local churches and charities. Similarly, a funnel project will be greatly helped by working out with the partner ministry what opportunities there would be for student leadership and ownership.

A one-off campaign has a clear and limited goal. It is a great way of engaging people with a particular issue and making real change. It will be up to you and the rest of your Just Love committee to work out the right balance between regular local projects and one-off local campaigns. Both are valuable. Bear in mind that campaigning can involve the personal and global strands of Just Love too.

Deciding what kind of project to start is a big decision, but all projects are likely to change over time, so the decision that you make at the start is not final. Prayer, building relationships with local church and charity projects and listening to the community all ought to help as you make this decision. In the next section we'll walk through all of this in more detail. It may be useful to use these as check lists as you set up a project. You don't necessarily need to follow the order, but aim to have all of them ticked off before you start a project.

Starting Up a Local Project Part 2: key things to consider

If you are partnering with another charity/church project (funnel):

1) Have you prayed?

Remember, we want to be praying throughout the whole process.

2) Is the project effective?

Are the church/charity providing relief, rehabilitation or development? Think through the sections above about community development and paternalism, do your own research, and reflect on whether this church/charity projects reflects best practice.

To what extent are they moving everyone involved in the project closer to being in right relationships with God, others, self and creation?

Are you confident in the professionalism of this project? Ask about legal procedures like data protection, about volunteer management, about pastoral care.

What impact will student volunteers have? What will it enable the partner to do that they would otherwise be unable to do?

3) Do they want to partner?

Obviously, we only want to send student volunteers where they are wanted and needed. Ask how students could best support their ministry. Explain that although students will only be there for around half of the year, they bring particular skills and lots of energy, and ask how those could best be put at the disposal of this particular project.

4) Are there clear lines of communication between you and the partner church/charity?

Agreeing on clear expectations for communication from the start will make life much easier for both you and your partners and will go a long way towards preventing misunderstanding or conflict from escalating in the future.

5) Who is responsible for safeguarding and pastoral care?

Once again, having a clear understanding with the partner on this will go a long way towards avoiding difficulties in the future.

6) Are you and the partner church/charity on the same page?

For a partnership to work well there needs to be coherence between the aims of Just Love and the aim of the partner. Examples where this could be a problem might be if you want to love people holistically – seeking to address all four dimensions of broken relationship – but the charity you are considering partnering with does not allow students to talk about the gospel, or if a church ministry runs a project that parachutes into economically-deprived communities once a year without attempting to build relationships with members of that community or affect sustainable long-term change.

The partnership will flourish when both sides understand and wholeheartedly support each other's mission.

7) Is there energy to do this among students?

Have you spoken to students who would love to volunteer with a project like this? Are there students whose passion would fit well with this project?

8) Does it ask too little of students?

We want to serve the local community in a way that will have a deep and lasting impact, both on the helped and the helpers. Are the students who volunteer with this particular project going to be challenged – will there be opportunities for them to grow. Opportunities for growth do not necessarily need to be big, loud leadership roles. For some people, serving faithfully in an un-glamorous and unseen role could help them cultivate servant-leadership. Local volunteering is not primarily about us, and our development. But it will be hard to motivate our students to keep volunteering if they feel like they are not using the gifts that God has given them and not being given any ownership over the project.

9) Does it ask too much of students?

We also mustn't go too far the other way and expect too much of students. Consider the level of commitment that is required (not just in the volunteering itself, but in things like travel). Is it challenging without seeming impossible or inaccessible?

If you are pioneering a new project:

1) Have you prayed?

Remember, we want to be praying throughout the whole process.

2) Is there a niche?

Are you confident that no one else is doing what you are planning to do?

3) Have you built strong relationships with local churches and charities, and are they supportive?

Even if we are pioneering our own projects, it is really important that we build strong relationships with the churches and charities who are running local projects already – especially those addressing similar issues, or based in similar geographical locations, to our project.

From that place of strong relationships, you can invite feedback about your plans. Remember, these church and charity workers are the experts – they probably understand the local community far better than we do – and so we should take their advice seriously. If they are not enthusiastic about you pioneering a new project, then try to get to the roots of their concerns. Maybe there are ways that you could alter your plans slightly. At the very least, we need to listen well to their feedback.

You may receive unreserved enthusiasm from partners. In some ways, this is less helpful than constructive criticism. It is always worth pressing them – anticipate some potential problems of pioneering the project and ask their advice.

4) Have you listened to the people you want to serve? Do they want this?

As outlined above, alongside building relationships with the people running existing projects, it is really important that we get to know and listen to the community we want to serve.

This can happen first of all on a broad geographical level – asset and needs mapping – as we are working out what sort of project we want to set up.

The listening can then take place on a more focussed level as we get to know the specific group of people that we want to help. If we want to do development well – if we want to run projects with people and not just for them – then as far as possible we want them to be involved in shaping the project.

5) Do you understand the issue you want to address?

Stating a project without having a solid grasp of the issue that we are seeking to address is a recipe for doing more harm than good. This doesn't mean we need to do years of research before we are qualified enough to start a project. It is more about ensuring that we build good relationships with people who have far more experience than we do, and that we go about the whole process as a humble learner – not assuming that we are the ones with all the answers.

6) Will it be effective?

What is the measurable impact that the project will actually have? In the long-run, what will it change?

7) How will you make it sustainable?

How can you make sure that the project is going to have the longevity needed to affect change? Are there people who will commit to it for the long-haul? How will you set a culture among volunteers that raised up the next generation of leaders? How are you going to ensure that there are people to take over the project when you leave? Have you read our Guide to Handover and Succession?

8) Where will you get expertise, accountability, and pastoral support?

One of the greatest dangers of an independent pioneer project is that they do not have the structures in place to manage difficult situations. Whilst the project leader(s) can provide a basic level of pastoral support and volunteer management, it is not a good idea for a student to take on sole responsibility for supporting the team.

Make the most of relationships with church and charity workers. They can provide expertise, they will understand the importance of accountability and pastoral support, and it's likely that they will want to help.

With accountability, having an advisor or a team of advisors from church or charities will help ensure stability of vision within the project.

With pastoral care, work out clear structures with local churches so that you know what to do in times of crisis.

9) How will you look after volunteers?

We need to have pastoral oversight from local churches, but the day-to-day responsibility of looking after volunteers falls to project leaders. Engagement in justice projects is likely to take

an emotional, spiritual, and physical toll on people. As project leaders, we need to make sure that our team are staying healthy. We cover this in more detail below.

10) Is there energy to do this among students?
Have you spoken to students who would love to volunteer with a project like this? Are there students whose passion would fit well with this project?

11) How will you ensure that all the legal aspects are well taken care of?
This is about the safety of our volunteers and those we are serving. Find someone with expertise in the charity sector and ask them for help as you go through all of this. Consider what might need risk assessment or insurance. If you are holding any personal data then you must make sure that it complies with data protection laws. You will need to have a clear safeguarding policy. If these feel like big barriers to get over, then do ask partners for help.

12) Will you require funding?
It is likely that any project will involve some sort of costs. How are we going to cover those costs? Is it something that students themselves could fund? If you are affiliated with your SU, maybe you could apply to them for funding. It is also worth exploring local grant making bodies (again, ask partner organisations about this).

Starting Up a Local Project Part 3: getting going

Once you have decided on the sort of project you are going to run, you can think about getting started.

1) Build a team

It's sensible to build a team early on in the process of setting up a project, especially to help with the research and listening exercises. The first step is to get the right people on the team. Who do you know who is passionate about this or a similar justice issue? What about people outside of your friendship group? Who do other people – on the committee, in churches – recommend? Arrange to meet people, cast the vision to them, invite them in, and ask them what ideas they have and how they might like to be involved.

Once you have a few people on board and you are beginning to get the project up and running, you'll need to think about how to structure the team.

Consider what needs to be done in order for the project to run smoothly and consider what the gifts and interests of those who are already involved are. Hopefully some people will fit obviously into particular roles. You may also need to think about inviting other people in to fill additional roles. Make sure that you consult the committee and the project team about this so that you don't miss people who might fit really well.

Make sure that from the start everyone on the team is really clear on what their roles and responsibilities are. These will almost certainly need to be refined as people settle into their roles, but if they start clear and well defined that will be a huge help.

2) Decide on vision

Vision is the end-point – the destination that you journey towards. Vision statements need to be clear and concise (fewer than 19 words). This will provide a focus point for the whole project, so it is worth taking time over. Why are you starting the project? Get the team involved in this because everyone must own this vision. Make sure that you bring in all the research you have done up to this point, then agree together on a vision.

3) Plan out timeline and structure

What are key steps in the process of getting started? What are the intermediate steps, when do they need to happen and how are you going to ensure that they happen? Who is going to be responsible for each step and when will they need to do each part?

4) Set goals

Once you have a vision and a plan, you can set some goals. What do you want to achieve in the next semester or in the next year? Do you want to have 20 regular volunteers? Do you want to mobilise 500 hours of volunteering? Do you want to hear testimonies of lives transformed in specific ways?

Make sure that the goals you set are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Ambitious, Realistic and Time-bound).

5) Start small

You don't have to instantly start up a huge, multi-faceted project where every single detail has been rigorously thought through. Planning well is really important, but don't get so obsessed with it that you never actually start anything. Start small – rather than trying to mobilise volunteers every night of the week, start with just one night. Start small and grow steadily – that ought to be more sustainable. Aim to do a few things really well and to learn as you go.

6) Start soon

Again, planning is really important, but don't let it stop you from ever starting. Starting soon means that you can do lots of the learning as you go. It may mean that you don't get everything right, but expect that, and see it as a great opportunity to learn, and to improve.

7) Celebrate success

What we choose to celebrate will define the culture of our team. It will also help to motivate volunteers and maintain focus on the vision. So, look for opportunities to celebrate as soon as possible and celebrate well.

Growing a Local Project

Strategy and Evaluation

Put simply, our projects will only be as good as our evaluation.

Make the most of Just Love's guide to Strategy and Impact Assessment, and create a culture that consistently asks 'how do we make it better?' Consistent and thorough evaluation will enable us to do growth really well.

Caring for volunteers

As we've already mentioned, it is important to have pastoral oversight from local churches or charities so that there are clear procedures and policies in place to ensure the health and safety of everyone involved. The day-to-day of looking after the team and helping them to thrive will, however, fall to the project leaders.

It is certainly worth asking your church leaders for advice and training on this. The aim is to ensure that everyone on the team is emotionally, physically, and spiritually healthy.

This is best done in the context of relationships – aim to meet with everyone one-to-one at least once a semester to listen to them and to help them evaluate what they are learning. Use our guide for help on this.

It is likely that people might react strongly to situations they encounter as they volunteer. Often such reactions are healthy and part of the process of discovering the reality of injustice and God's heart for the oppressed. How we respond to such situations as leaders is really important. We need to take people's reactions seriously, to listen well, to encourage them that what they are feeling is not necessarily bad and shouldn't be ignored or supressed. It might be a good idea to suggest they find an older adult who can help them to process these emotions. We certainly don't want to dismiss their situations with unhelpful platitudes, or make them feel that their experience is abnormal and unhealthy.

The maintenance of healthy boundaries is also an important skill for volunteers to learn. It is easy for mercy gifts to become all-consuming and that is a recipe for burn-out. Having solid boundaries of how you interact with the project and with those you are helping will guard against burn-out. You can help the team with this by modelling healthy boundaries, and by making it a topic of regular and honest conversation.

Addressing poor commitment

If local volunteering is going to be effective, it will almost always require regular commitment and consistency. That is how strong relationships are formed. Often though, students can find commitment challenging. This is a problem that most local projects will encounter.

The most important step in ensuring high levels of commitment is setting clear expectations before anyone starts volunteering. Make sure they understand what they are committing to and why it really matters that they turn up when they say they will and communicate well in advance if they are ever unable to make it.

If, despite clear expectations, there is still a problem, then you have to confront the issue. Left unchecked, poor commitment can be toxic for the team because it undermines trust and can create resentment. Talk with the volunteer. Try to get to the root of the issue – why is it that they struggle to consistently fulfil what they promised? How can you help them? Be prepared to take more than your share of the blame – perhaps acknowledging that you have not supported them as much as you could have done. Agree together on action points and make sure that you follow them up.

If the problem persists, then it may reach a point where you need to ask someone to stop volunteering because their inconsistency does more harm than good to the project. Hopefully this will be very rare and most problems can be resolved much earlier.

Raising up leaders

Whether we are running a pioneer or a funnel project, or a hybrid of the two, sustainability needs to be a priority. Raising up a next generation of leaders will go a long way towards ensuring sustainability.

The aim is for the person or people who take over the project from you to be far better leaders than you ever could be. So, think about how you can ensure that this is the case. Identify leaders early on – looking first for character, then competence and commitment. Think about how you can gradually delegate more responsibility to those emerging leaders. Use the tightropes and safety nets model for growing leaders.[12]

Keeping people motivated

If there is a clear purpose to what people do when they volunteer, if there is a compelling vision that they are part of, if there is exceptional support and pastoral care, if there is a focus on growing as disciples, if there is a strong sense of ownership over the project and if there is a culture of celebration then you will have a highly motivated team.

Training

This depends largely on the sort of project you are running, but there will almost always be skills and knowledge that will be of real help as you volunteer with your project.

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[12] It's worth referring to Just Love's Guide to Handover and Succession for more detail on tightropes and safety nets

Ask partners in local churches and charities what training they would recommend and what they could provide. Ask your volunteers what kind of training they would find useful. Talk to your Just Love coordinator about this too – it might be that they could run some workshops.

Remember, that one of our core values in Just Love is quality. We don't want to just provide training for the sake of it – we want to be confident that training will be excellently delivered and relevant for its audience.

Ensuring that everything stays centred on Jesus

The first of our core values is living like Christ, and that means that we want everything that we do in Just Love to be saturated in prayer and rooted in scripture. Think about how we can ensure that this is true of your justice project. We can achieve a lot without God, and we will need to be proactive in keeping every part of our project centred on Jesus. Are the team praying? Are there opportunities to study the bible together? Are we, as a team, actively seeking to grow in our spiritual and emotional maturity?

Remember that your regional coordinators are there to help – make the most of them and ask them questions about anything that doesn't make sense.