

Campaigning with Craftivism

Craft + Activism = Craftivism

Craftivism is another useful tool in your activism toolkit, alongside writing petitions, attending marches and other tactics. Whether you're trying to attract new audiences or motivate existing campaigners, craftivism can be super useful to change our world.

You don't need to be an expert: anyone can help to inspire thoughtful engagement, build a sense of collective achievement, and create something beautiful and personal using craftivism. People who assume campaigning – or crafting – is not for them may find a new and deeper connection to the issues they care about.

'With courage, care and compassion, your craftivism can make the world a more beautiful, kind and just place.'



Sarah Corbett, Founder of Craftivist Collective

Hi, I'm Sarah Corbett.

I'm a Christian, an award-winning activist and the founder of the global Craftivist Collective. I'm proud to have worked for Christian Aid as a staff member a few years ago, helping individuals, churches and groups to be effective campaigners.

My 'Gentle Protest' approach might sound fluffy, weak or passive. In fact, it has helped to change hearts, minds, business policies and laws around the world.

If your craftivism is delivered with courage, care and compassion, you too can help make the world a more beautiful and just place - not simply through the results of your campaigning, but through the craftivism process too. Here's my advice on how to be an effective craftivist.



A 'stitch-in' attracts passers-by to join a dialogue on social change.

How and why it works

Craftivism shouldn't replace other effective activism tactics. It can complement and strengthen your campaign, particularly by using the craftivism process, product and its power in public spaces, to engage people in different ways.

1

Power in the process

You can use craftivism to channel your anger and sadness about injustice into something strategic and positive. Crafts such as hand-embroidery and paper craft are made up of careful, repetitive actions. The meditative quality of using your hands helps you think more deeply and critically about the complexities of the injustice you are addressing, and how to create a robust campaign strategy.

Alone or in a group, use the time to empathise with those involved in the injustice— both those affected by and part of enabling the problems. Stitch by stitch, reflect on your power to make a change and how we can all be part of the solution.

2

Power in the product

Craftivism can be a great way to become a critical friend, not an aggressive enemy.

The time and energy you dedicate to making a bespoke handmade gift for a decision maker shows them the commitment you have for the cause. It's also a physical object for them to keep, to remind them of their responsibilities and encourage them to use their power for the greater good.

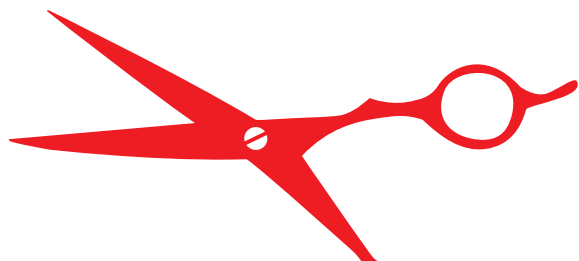
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Power in the public sphere

Craftivism projects that are made to be put in public spaces are more powerful and engaging if they are small, beautiful and with an intriguing message, rather than big and brash. They can encourage without being confrontational, create curiosity about why an injustice is happening, and quietly help passers-by to think through the ways they can be part of the solution.

Christian Aid's campaign topics can sometimes feel distant or abstract; many of us have never seen the impacts of inequality face-to-face.

Craft helps the maker engage with an issue by using their hands, head and heart together. It can help us see where we can be God's stewards of our fragile world. When trying to influence action, craftivism has a unique angle. The unusual activism action and beautiful images can also attract media and social media attention for more thought and discussion online as well as offline.



Engaging people in climate campaigning

The Craftivist Collective were asked to encourage people who had never campaigned before to join the 2015 Climate Change March.

I set up an event to attract and encourage new campaigners to consider the issues ('power of the process'), wear their heart at the climate march ('power of the product') and continue wearing their heart on their sleeve to keep up conversation in the public sphere after the march.

We invited the new craftivists to reflect on this urgent issue, alone or in conversation, by making 'A Heart For Your Sleeve'. They wrote one word on a strip of felt, representing something they love that will be affected by climate change - everything from 'chocolate' to 'grandchildren' to 'the city of Norwich'. They then stitched over the word while reflecting on crafterthought questions I provided, and listening to a speaker on why their presence at the march was important. Many people still wear their hearts now, years later, to provoke thought in themselves and conversations with others about climate justice.

'The first ten minutes I just felt frustrated at my terrible handiwork! I had to unpick my stitching... but starting from scratch was the most important moment. It made me stop - and I mean really stop - and think about what I was doing. It allowed me to be a fuller 'me', as it didn't stop my critical thinking. If anything, it made my brain work better.'

- craftivist Holly on making her 'Heart For Your Sleeve'

Starting your own craftivism action

1

Plan your action

Research

Read about the Christian Aid campaign you have chosen. You could consider:

- what the injustice is
- why and how it's happening
- what action Christian Aid suggests you take
- whose attention and decisions can help eradicate these injustices.

Where could craftivism be used to strengthen a Christian Aid campaign?

2

Prioritise

Before you pick up your needle and thread or papercraft, you need a plan.

Focusing on a particular person or group makes your craftivism project bespoke: you make them feel special, heard, valued - and more likely to engage with you.

For example, should you try to engage your local parliamentarian or could you work with a church in another constituency if their politician might be more influential? Should you prioritise campaigning to businesses that invest in unethical practices? If you are trying to change public opinion or behaviour, how can you attract a particular group of people to make that change in themselves?



A bespoke handkerchief, hand-embroidered as a gift for a board member.

'What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?'

Micah 6:8



Crafts where you use your hands in a slow, repetitive way can help you reflect deeply on your campaign and create something unique. Quick, easy objects are not as special for the receiver so can be less engaging. Text is important - it helps the maker take ownership of the message and reduces the risk of your craftivism action being misunderstood. Don't be tempted to create big, ego-driven projects: practice your craftivism with courage, care and compassion for all involved.

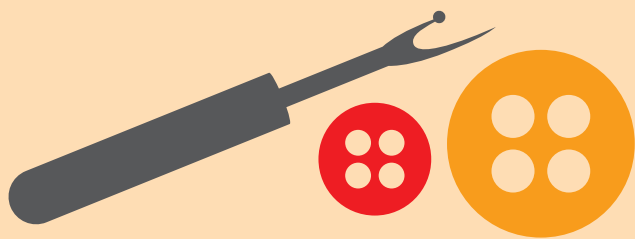
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Design

Think about which crafts might be suitable. Are you a solo craftivist or a group? What time and resources do you need? How will you deliver and use your action?

For example:

- You could make an object like the Craftivist Collective embroidered footprint shape that you keep on display at home or work. It's a physical reminder to lovingly challenge yourself to live out your faith with each step you take: treating people how you would like to be treated, protecting our fragile world and the creatures in it, and walking humbly with our God.
- The Craftivist Collective encouraged Marks and Spencer to increase the wage of 50,000 of their staff to be in line with the Living Wage - by giving bespoke handkerchiefs as gifts to board members with a handwritten letter robustly outlining the case. [Watch the talk](#) about this campaign strategy.
- Make a beautiful clay vase to deliver with paper flowers made by members of your church family. By making the flowers out of newspaper articles about climate change, you can help remind your local politician to be part of solving environmental degradation, not causing it.
- Leave hidden messages for people, with facts, questions or suggestions of how they can be part of a positive change. The Craftivist Collective "[Mini Fashion Statements](#)", are little handwritten paper scrolls in the pockets of clothes for shoppers to find. They engaged customers about the unethical side of the fashion industry, and the campaign featured widely in the media because it was delivered without judgement or shaming. Instead, it intrigued people, encouraging them to be curious about who made their clothes and how they could be part of improving the fashion industry.



'It created the perfect forum for young people to really engage with an issue. Unlike other forms of activism, it created a safe environment for staff, students and parents to relate to one another about the pressing issue and reflect before reacting... allowing all involved to channel their voice through their own unique creativity.'

Sarah Corris, global education project manager for World AIMS



Small groups working together, with tools and materials to share.

Running a workshop

Craftivism can be an attractive and accessible way to involve others in campaigning. For you and your church, it can be a chance to grow in community on issues you care about.

4

Take action

Don't forget that your activism comes first, and craft is your tool. The more strategic you make your project, the more impact it can have. Don't shoehorn a love of craft into your activism if it is not the best tool to use at a particular time.

Keep your goal in focus so you don't lose hope or direction. Use the time and repetitive handicraft action, alone or with others, to help you be mindful of your emotions and understand how they affect your campaigning. You can use the meditative action to pray about the issue and ask God for wisdom to be effective – I do this a lot when I'm crafting alone. Create your object with care and courage, and use it with hope: you might be surprised at the results it brings.

The Rev Martin Luther King Jr preached that effective campaigners need a 'tough mind and a tender heart'.

1

Setting

A closed, timed workshop

The most effective workshops are often in a quiet, closed-off room, without distractions. Attract and welcome people by making the space inviting. Natural light helps people see their handiwork more easily. Tables for small groups create a space for discussion and sharing of resources. Decorating the tables with light-coloured tablecloths and flowers can soften a room. Instrumental music in the background can make the experience feel special (check out my free ['Crafterthought playlist'](#)) and help people focus.

Don't forget to make the room accessible for all. Encourage people to be respectful, slow down, and make their creation with thought and strategy. Your crafterthought questions, relevant Bible passages, and Christian Aid partner stories to reflect on, are just as important as clear craft instructions. Make sure they are clearly visible for everyone, and have a confident facilitator to help people focus if conversations are going off on a tangent.

A workshop in a public space can engage passers-by, but may also distract your makers. Consider your priority: is it the quality of the workshop and object, or attracting more people?

A 'stitch-in'

You can use your making as a performance piece – for example, by stitching in a public place connected to your campaign, as a tactic for reaching power-holders, media or relevant passers-by. The Craftivist Collective held small 'stitch-in' picnics in train stations to create conversation and media-worthy images about the economic and climate impact of rising train fares. Keep these 'stitch-in' picnics quiet and friendly to attract passers-by in conversation without causing a burden or being intimidating.

Crafterthoughts: Encouraging reflection

There is power in the process of making. It's a chance to think deeply about your campaigning. If you are not considering the social justice issue whilst crafting, you are not fulfilling the potential of your craftivism session or object.

Crafterthought questions, scripture and stories can help people to engage deeply, strategically and compassionately. They can help your group feel committed to the cause, as well as more hopeful and confident as campaigners on your chosen issue.

Examples of crafterthought questions to have visible at your workshops:


- What are my Christian values? How do I thread them through my thoughts, words and deeds?
- What can I do to help solve this injustice - as a constituent, consumer, colleague, family or church member?
- If I am one of the people who Christian Aid says has power to fix the injustice, what is stopping me? Time? Money? Understanding?
- If I were a member of the public who didn't know about this issue, how would it be relevant to me? What would empower me to be part of the positive change?

Biblical reflections

In a response to our personal relationship with God, the Psalms are an incredible creative work. They celebrate and praise the gifts God has given us, but do not back down from challenges.

Could one of the Psalms inspire you at the beginning of your workshop? Try starting with Psalm 104 or 139. Read it slowly, aloud. If you think they would be comfortable with this, ask each person to read out two lines. After some time for thoughts whilst crafting, you could ask the group what stood out for them and how it made them feel.

Check caid.org.uk for prayers and reflections linked to your campaign.



Stitching a message as a reminder to tread gently on our planet.

2 Resources

What will you need? Can you ask people to bring things with them so that everyone takes ownership of the activity? For example, a pair of scissors being shared between two creates a sense of solidarity and supporting each other. Try to source your resources as ethically as possible, such as upcycling fabrics.

3 Invitations

Talking to people individually, or sending personal invites, explaining how they personally can help the campaign, will help make them feel more valued and therefore more likely to attend your event and group. People are often busy: how can your invitation show them a joyful opportunity, rather than feeling like a burden - or worse, a guilt trip?

4 Structure

A craftivism workshop should be at least 60 minutes long. You'll be surprised how quickly the time goes.

Remind people that they don't need craft skills, and make your project accessible to as many people as possible (craftivism works best for people aged 14 or older).

Start by thanking and welcoming people, explain which Christian Aid campaign you're supporting and why, and how the activity will help. You can explain the process, including the importance of using the craft time to reflect on scripture and the crafterthought questions. You could share one Christian Aid partner story before starting, or 15 minutes into the workshop - once people know what their hands are doing and their minds can focus on engaging more deeply with the issue.

Allow comfortable silence (with instrumental music in the background) for people to reflect. I often find the room going from conversation to silence in waves, organically.

You can explain that people may not finish their project in one session; you don't want them to rush it. Encourage them to take what they need to finish their project at home, or to meet for a second session.



What next?

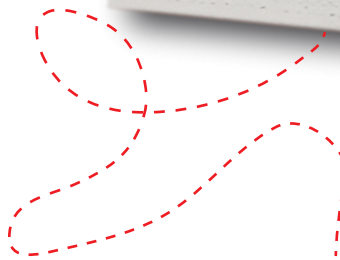
You'll already have decided what to do with your crafts. If you are giving them to a particular powerholder, using them in a display, or collecting them from participants for another reason, you might like to provide participants with something to take away. Maybe something to remind them of the campaign and reflect further: a quote or image on a bookmark, or a thank-you card with a personal message.

How will you display or deliver your craftivism? If you are giving a gift, will you deliver it by hand? How will you explain its purpose and use it to open a dialogue? Could you ask some of the workshop participants to deliver them, or meet the person your campaign is aiming to reach?

How will you continue the conversation with your fellow craftivists? Encourage them to continue campaigning through craft and other methods. Do you want to encourage people to share their progress on social media with each other and @craftivists? As you build up your campaign, and take on new actions, how can you continue to incorporate craftivism where appropriate? Craftivism is most effective as a tool for slow, quiet, intimate and intriguing activism. Use it where you think loud or quick tactics are not the best responses.

Craftivists unite! Good luck using your hands, head and heart together to create little examples of the Kingdom of God on Earth, as catalysts for positive change. I hope this resource inspires and empowers you to live out your faith. God Bless.

Sarah  



Find out more

If you'd like to develop your craftivism further:

Read the book **'How to be a Craftivist: the art of gentle protest'** by **Sarah Corbett**, which inspired this resource.

Look at the Craftivist Collective website to take part in and be inspired by many other projects.

Join the conversation with craftivists on Twitter and Instagram **@Craftivists** or on the Facebook Page **@CraftivistCollective**

Use other resources from the Christian Aid campaigner toolkit to keep up the conversation with those in power, grow your campaign, and get others involved.

