

Starting a Special Needs Ministry

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- #1. Find your heartbeat: Connect to a story of a child with special needs.
- #2. Start building your vision and vision cast with your senior leadership.
 - Stories of families in your church this is going to help.
 - How God is leading you on this journey.
 - Your commitment.
- #3. Determine what area of ministry Special Needs will fall underneath?
 - Are you a large church? Is there a Pastoral Care Pastor?
 - Are you going to be doing this on your own/ in conjunction with another job?
 - Who will take care of kids when they grow older? Will the youth ministry?
 - Who will take care of deaths in the ministry?
 - How will you handle hospitalizations/ long term medical care when families need support? Who will support the families in those situations?
- #4. Do your homework:
 - Read Books! See Facebook group for links.
 - Visit websites that are also listed on the Facebook group such as: joniandfriends.com, theinclusivechurch.com, easterseals.org, specialneedsparenting.net
 - Check out your local Children's hospital for seminars!
 - Join Facebook groups: Autism society, Down Syndrome, Sensory-Processing groups.
- #5. Make visits to other churches with Special Needs Ministries.
 - Networking gives you friends to bounce ideas off of but it also helps when you are close in proximity. You can refer families to one another!
 - Visit during the week to ask a lot of questions and then visit again later on a Sunday.
 - Ask for sample documents.
 - Take a lot of pictures! It will help you when pricing things out you like.
- #6. Know the Budget/ Fundraising.
 - Price everything and don't cut things short.
 - Know your budget.
 - If you don't have a budget, no problem. Work with local businesses by giving them a vision of the ministry. See what happens! It is a great way to tell the community that your church is starting a Special Needs Ministry, when you partner with a local business.
 - There is something about Special Needs! God will touch the hearts of people! Watch what He does!

#7. Know how you “plan” on running the ministry.

- Buddy system?
- How many volunteers will it take each week?
- Will you run the ministry for all of your services?
- Will you have self-contained rooms?
- How many children/adults can fit in those rooms?
- Where will the rooms be located? Will they be together or separate?
- Be creative!

#8. Present everything again to your senior pastor.

- Give him your whole detailed plan.
- Give him every reason you should do this!
- If you can't answer his questions, tell him you will find the answers and get right back to him.

#9. Vision Cast with your Kid Min Team and your Church!

- Kid Min Team: Make sure they hear it before the church! Make sure they are excited about your vision! Their excitement can be like wildfire! You want them to be “Pre-planted advocates” for when you vision cast for the church!
- Church: Make sure you educate them, spark their interest, and you connect their hearts to a heart of a special needs child.

#10. Leadership/ Volunteers-

- Leadership- Have Service Leaders or Team Leaders and make sure they share the same vision!
- Define your role and their role in the ministry. Have job descriptions.
- Volunteers- Help them understand where they belong in the ministry so they are passionate about serving. Train them! Use video trainings to start out.

#11. Invite your church for an open house.

- Have all of your team members there with their name tags on!
- Be ready to welcome new team members and parents with important documents ready and volunteers ready to give tours!
- Have activities ready for kids. Make it a safe place for kids right away. Offer private tours for families that can not stay.

#12. Soft Opening

- Take time to transition existing kids in the ministry.
- Work out any issues.
- Take your time!

#13. Advice / Mistakes

- Parents: We avoid using parents as volunteers in the ministry.
- Policies: Just because someone else's policy works for them, it may not work for you!
- Location: Avoid any upstairs locations.
- Look at the room: Remember that they are kids first! Don't forget the fun stuff!