

Charity fundraising and social action is for life, not just for Christmas

Over the past week, we have witnessed the Christmas season being launched with a bang - or perhaps even an explosion - of activity. Our Christmas Fayre kicking off proceedings last Friday (1 December) with a Christmas Market, carols, festive refreshments, Christmas-themed games and activities, Father Christmas in his grotto with reindeer to boot. Three performances of the Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 Christmas Nativity production wowed audiences this week with songs, acting, dance and narration (and some incredible solos delivered by our youngest children!), bringing festive cheer and seasonal excitement to all.

Nursery, Preschool and Reception delighted audiences with their Christmas singing on Wednesday at the Christmas Cafe, taking to the stage and performing their carefully-practised songs - for many their first performance opportunity which demanded much confidence and trust - before engaging with their adult visitors in a range of Christmas Crafts. Christmas Crafts continued on Thursday with a whole Junior School event (Years 1 to 6) after school with the addition of some friends from outside school joining in the fun.

Today is our whole school mufti and Christmas Jumper Day, as part of Save the Children's fundraising for children in the UK and around the world, and next week will see the Junior School Christmas Celebration (Tuesday 12 December), the Christmas Carol Concert (Thursday 14 December), Christmas lunch on Wednesday 13 December, plus a Christmas film afternoon for both Junior and Senior pupils. House Christmas celebrations in Junior School and Senior School House plays will round off the calendar year, with the Celebration Assemblies completing the picture. Of course, there is so much more happening in lessons, breakout areas and clubs - Christmas is definitely on its way!

Christmas is a time for celebration, coming together and collaboration; it is also a time of giving of our time as well as gifts. In school, raising awareness and funds for charity is an all year round endeavour, and an essential part of our school ethos - charitable outreach benefits those in need but also our own pupils, fostering social responsibility, and, in turn, supporting and engaging with local, national and international initiatives.

While we try to focus on whole school charity initiatives - including Food Bank Collections for the Trussell Trust, Children in Need, the British Legion's poppy appeal in just the last few weeks - individual fundraising also takes place regularly in school, including sales of baked goods and accessories to raise money for Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust, pre-loved clothes, freshly baked cakes and a book sale in aid of the Red Cross' humanitarian support for Israel and Palestine, amongst other important initiatives. Through these charity initiatives, we all have a heightened sense of how fortunate we are, and learn to reach out to one another, supporting those in need who do not have access to the life chances many of us take for granted.

Piles of shoe boxes wrapped in brightly coloured paper and decorated with personal messages are being assembled outside the Heads of Year office, with Year 7 pupils diligently preparing their boxed gifts ready to donate through Rotary to children in Moldova. Fundraising activity is everywhere at Christmas. Indeed, half (48%) of people say they are more likely to give at Christmas than during the rest of the year, rising to 69% for Gen Z, despite many feeling worse off, according to research from Enthuse*. Money isn't the only thing people plan on giving over Christmas however, with 61% of people saying they plan to donate items.

2023 has been a year defined by soaring prices and rising interest rates, and unfortunately, high inflation is predicted to be persistent throughout 2023 and 2024. Although households have less disposable income available for donating, the same research has shown that the will to give hasn't diminished. However, people will likely make smaller donations and will be more selective in who they give to.***

Despite the cost of living crisis, one of the UK's largest match-funded campaigns has raised a record £33m for 1,077 charities in a week. This year's Big Give's Christmas Challenge ran between 28 November and 5 December and received more than 94,000 donations from members of the public. In total, the campaign raised £33m for charities including Children on the Edge, Stick 'n' Step and UK Wild Otter Trust, which is 15% more than last year's total of £28.6m (2021: £24.1m).

Some 74% of the charities that took part in the campaign met or exceeded their fundraising target, a 4% increase compared with the previous year. Earlier this year, Big Give announced that it had given out nearly £100m in match funding to charitable organisations since 2007. It has raised a total of £233m for charitable causes since it began 15 years ago, which include donations of £113m, match funding of £97.4m and gift aid of £20.1m.**

It is not just about the money, of course. Fundraising campaigns are a good opportunity to develop those personal and social skills such as planning, communication and teamwork - allowing pupils to design and see through a project rather than simply fronting an activity is a great chance for them to develop personally in ways that can surprise and engender a sense of deep satisfaction.

At Northampton High, it is the students who drive the fundraising. Our Deputy Head Girl for Partnerships and part of the Student Senior Leadership Team (SSLT) - this year, Risha B - speaks to the pupils and staff at the beginning of the year, proposes local charities as potential recipients of the school's fundraising efforts for the year, and then invites all pupils and staff to vote on their preferred local charity. This year, the chosen charity is Northampton Hope Centre, whose work helps people experiencing disadvantage, hardship, homelessness, addiction and mental health struggles to help themselves.

Our Christmas Fayre raised no less than £3231.55 this year with £2447.16 being donated to Northampton Hope Centre with the proceeds from the raffle, tombola, silent auction and Santa's Grotto. A further £784.38 was raised for the school's Astroturf project from proceeds of the festive refreshments and pitch fees from the Christmas Market. This impressive total brings us to £6063 raised for a range of charitable causes this term alone. A huge thank you to all parents, pupils, staff and friends for contributing to this impressive total, but also for supporting us in our wider outreach efforts, and not least for jump-starting the Christmas spirit and all that it brings.

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*<https://fundraising.co.uk/>, Melanie May, Individual Giving research, 7 December 2022

**<https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/>, Lea Lagraien, Civil Society, 6 December 2023

*** <https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk> , Lucy Brookes, 13 October 2023