



ECH Christmas Tree Collection

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EAST CHESHIRE HOSPICE

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO FUNDRAISE?

In 1999 Prestbury Church was trying to raise money to replace its failing organ. A member of the Choir suggested that £10 be given to each choir member to be returned hopefully with interest (as with The Parable of the Talents.)

WHAT DID YOU CHOOSE TO DO AND WHY?

The Chapman family struck on the idea of collecting and recycling Christmas Trees after the festive period. "Save all that mess in your car by having your Christmas Tree collected and recycled and at the same time make a donation to charity."

They organised a collection in the Prestbury area and divided the proceeds equally between a Children's Charity and the Organ fund. It was a great success and the following year friends and neighbours asked if they were going to do it again. So the Collection was born and started growing. We could never have dreamt that in the years ahead we could collect 3,900 trees and raise £36,000 in one weekend.

WHAT WAS INVOLVED AND DID YOU GET MUCH HELP FROM THE ORGANISATION/PEOPLE YOU WERE SUPPORTING?

160 Helpers, 30 lorries, 3,900 customers, and more than 63 Tonnes of recycled trees (the weight of 13 African elephants!) This has become a real community event with close links and support from the Hospice. To make this all happen we rely on detailed preparation and many man hours of work. The main items in this are:

- Planning:

It all starts with detailed planning sessions usually in the local pub (starts October each year) – there is a focus on having fun!

- Publicity:

We mount an extensive publicity campaign where we produce posters and thousands of leaflets. We then arrange for these leaflets to be given away at door to door drops and with every tree that is sold in our collection area. Our volunteers also stand at the main Christmas tree sellers to collect customer details.

The collection is now advertised in the press and through sponsored advertising on local radio. Our local Council also advertise the collection on every wheelie bin in the area.

- Email/Telephone campaign

We combine an email and telephone campaign to enlist our previous customers. We email our past customers wherever possible, however many customers prefer to be phoned. Though this is a long process it does wonders for raising awareness of the Hospice and achieves more than a 70% success rate in recruiting past customers.

- Web-Site

Having started with a simple spreadsheet we have a well developed web-site including self service logging facilities at www.echtrees.org.uk This system enables us to plan automatically routes for our lorries and manage the 3,900 individual house to house collections.

- Food.

Keeping our army of 160 volunteers sustained over the collection weekend is vitally important. McDonalds kindly provided the food over many years and gaining their sponsorship was fantastic, but we out-grew their restaurant! We now have a catering team who prepare hot-pot and serve it at the local recycling depot. This is famously known to all who help as 'The Mulcher's Arms'.

- Local Council Support

We get great support from our local council, from advertising on the wheelie bins, to the provision of a team of helpers to recycle the trees.

- Sponsorship

Thanks to our sponsors all our costs are covered so every penny from the collection can go directly to the Hospice. This support really is essential to us and it came in many forms from local radio advertising to fuel, financial assistance, provision of facilities, discounts on food and lorry hire etc.

- The Hospice Team

As the collection has grown we have welcomed the increased involvement of the Hospice Team. The staff and volunteers at the Hospice take a key role in the ring around of past customers, provide bacon butty breakfasts for all our helpers, collect trees and finally provide a thank-you ceremony for our helpers and sponsors.

Our relationship with the Hospice gets closer each year and we feel the efforts of all our team are truly appreciated.

HOW MANY PEOPLE ON YOUR VOLUNTEER FUNDRAISING TEAM AND HOW DID YOU GET YOUR TEAM TOGETHER?

Though we started in a small way, in January 2008 we had a total of more than 160 people involved in the collection. This team started as a group of friends, it has now become "friends of friends" and people joining through Church groups, work colleagues, village cricket teams etc. There is a strong team spirit and a real desire to help our Hospice. Nearly everybody knows of or has had association with the Hospice movement. We try to make it a fun event that everyone wants to be part of.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE PLANNING FOR IT?

Planning is essential and we have a detailed plan that we are happy to share. We also have an IT specialist and a financial expert on our team.

This year we had more than 30 lorries on the go so we carefully compile folders with rounds, maps etc. We prepare health and safety packs for each lorry as well as "goody bags".

Health and safety has always been a major concern. We undertake formal risk assessments, and give safety briefings each day. Our worst fear is that somebody has an accident. We comply with the terms of the Hospice's insurance policy and cannot allow children under the age of 13 to join the collection.

HOW LONG DID IT TAKE, INCLUDING EVERYONE'S TIME?

The collection itself takes place on one weekend per year, however there is also a considerable amount of preparation time

160 people each gave at least one day of their time and some gave several days. The planning team (which is a small core of just 4 people) gave many man days of effort.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE ASKING FOR DONATIONS, ANY TOP TIPS?

We set the suggested minimum donation at £4 per tree, although the amount given does vary greatly. Most people give £5, some give considerably more. We have had donations over £500. We try to thank all those who give by leaving thank you slips and publishing the overall results on our web-site.

Many people say that they are delighted to support the Hospice by giving money to a team of people who are not only really working for it but are doing such a worthwhile job as well. We have had many comments that this is in contrast to so much fund-raising which is carried out by people being sponsored for something they would do anyway eg running a marathon.

Gaining sponsorship has got easier as the collection has got bigger and well known. Sponsorship is vital and is a major focus for the team.

WHAT WAS YOUR TARGET?

We shouldn't set targets but informally we do – this year our target was £34,000.

HOW MUCH DID YOU RAISE?

This year we raised over £36,000 and were also provided with £1,100 of IBM computer equipment for the Hospice. We have struggled with gift-aid but are very hopeful that if we resolve the outstanding issues this will further boost our total.

WOULD YOU DO IT AGAIN?

I don't think we can get out of it! Of course we would do it again – it's exhausting but great fun.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE WANTING TO DO THE SAME THING?

- Start small and grow with it, gather £ for £ sponsorship if you can.
- Have fun but cover the Health and Safety aspects very carefully.

- Plan carefully - it will save hours of worry.
- Keep the management team small and try to maintain a personal touch to all the activities.
- Beware of dogs!

If any group wished to start a Christmas Tree collection we would happily share our resources and planning documents - start by looking at our website:
www.echtrees.org.uk

Fundraising idea category • Service, sales and auctions
