

The Big Give Christmas Campaign 2025

Awards Application



Supporting
people from
street floor
to front door



About Jimmy's Cambridge

Who We Are

From street floor to front door

Jimmy's opened in 1995 as Cambridge's first all year round night shelter and now offers a much wider range of support. It remains one of the most prominent organisations within the community supporting people who have been rough sleeping in the city.

Whilst Jimmy's has undergone several significant transformations since it opened, its ethos has remained the same – placing people at the heart of the support we provide.

Jimmy's is a community-based charity with the belief that no-one should have to sleep rough in Cambridge. We provide safe places people can call home. From emergency accommodation within the 25 rooms at our East Road shelter, longer term care in one of the 9 bedrooms at our multiple needs centre, to 10 supported houses and 22 modular homes. All are important stepping-stones to independent living.

Jimmy's aim is to offer targeted, wrap-around support to promote mental wellbeing, and help our residents fulfil their goals. We use an evidence-based approach to enhance our services, increase our impact, and advocate for meaningful change.

Values

- Treating people with respect
- Accepting people as they are
- Believing in opportunities for everyone
- Behaving with integrity

Registered Charity Number: 1058737

Visit our website: jimmyscambridge.org.uk

Upon arrival at Jimmy's, each person is welcomed by friendly, professional support workers and volunteers, who are there to help every step of the way. Jimmy's works with each person individually, providing tailored support through a collaborative approach. This includes life skills such as budgeting, help with accessing health services such as registering with a GP, and support from our partners for substance use and addiction. The relationship with Jimmy's residents can be a matter of days, or stretch into years depending on their needs.

Many of the people we support experience mental ill health. Jimmy's aim is to ensure everyone receives the support and guidance they need. We provide direct mental health support through our trained staff, or help people navigate the complexities of accessing more specialised care through the NHS. Some of the holistic in-house support we offer includes music therapy, creative writing, and yoga classes. These workshops can also provide additional benefits to our residents beyond mental wellbeing support.

Some of those who attend Jimmy's face challenges with drug or alcohol use, often linked to mental ill health or trauma. Regardless of the reason, we provide vital support to people whose addictions can be a barrier to living independently. We help individuals access specialist services (both in-house and through our partners) and spend time supporting them to reduce their use of alcohol or substances while keeping them safe from harm.

Key Statistics: Jimmy's Cambridge in 2025



250

people were
helped by Jimmy's



33

individuals were supported into
more independent accommodation



76%

of residents at East Road told us they
are experiencing mental ill health



40,000

meals were provided across
our services



576

group holistic activities
were offered to residents

The Context

Homelessness in Cambridge

The Local Picture in 2025

In 2025, rough sleeping and homelessness continue to be a significant and visible issue in Cambridge, despite the city's prosperity. Rising living costs, high private rents, and a severe shortage of affordable housing have pushed many people into housing insecurity, with some experiencing homelessness for the first time. The ongoing cost-of-living crisis has further intensified these pressures, making it increasingly difficult for people on low incomes or with complex needs to sustain their tenancies.

In Summer 2025, a street count identified 37 people sleeping rough in Cambridge on a single night. Street counts only capture those who are visible at the time, meaning some people experiencing homelessness (such as those sleeping in hidden locations or who have found a bed for the night) are not included. As a result, demand for Jimmy's services continues to rise, with more people requiring emergency accommodation alongside longer-term, tailored support to help them move from street homelessness towards stable, independent living.

Why Fundraising Matters

Fundraising plays a vital role in enabling Jimmy's to respond flexibly to the complex and changing needs of people experiencing homelessness in Cambridge. Unrestricted funding is particularly important, as it allows us to direct resources where they are most urgently needed - whether that is maintaining safe accommodation, providing specialist support, or responding to unexpected pressures on our services.



Why We Took Part in the Big Give Christmas Challenge

In 2025, Jimmy's took part in the Big Give Christmas Challenge for the first time, creating a new and significant income stream for the organisation. This initiative aligns closely with our strategic priority to increase and diversify income through match-funded donations.

The decision to participate was particularly timely, as 2025 also marked Jimmy's 30th anniversary. This milestone prompted us to reassess our fundraising approach, trial new campaigns and income opportunities, and strengthen supporter engagement. With demand for our services continuing to rise, growing unrestricted income is a key organisational priority.

Historically, Jimmy's has run a Christmas appeal through our website each year, forming a key part of our annual fundraising calendar. However, we recognised that match funding offered a unique opportunity to significantly increase income beyond what we could achieve through a standalone appeal. The Big Give model enabled us to combine pledger support with Champion match funding, effectively doubling the value of public donations and maximising supporter impact at a critical time of year.

Taking part in the Big Give also enabled us to align our Christmas appeal with a nationally recognised and trusted campaign. The fixed campaign window created a strong sense of urgency, which proved to be a powerful motivator for supporters. Feedback confirmed that the opportunity to double donations was a key driver of engagement, with supporters responding enthusiastically to the chance to maximise their impact.

Our Big Give Christmas Challenge 2025 at a Glance

Key results



Target: £35,000



Total raised (excl. Gift Aid): £42,418



Net total (with Gift Aid & after fees): £45,487.18



We exceeded our target by 30%



Number of donations: 137



New donors: 81

Planning and Preparation

Campaign Planning

July

- Campaign planning began, with the fundraising target agreed.
- Big Give application submitted.
- Outreach to potential pledgers started.

October

- Champion match funding confirmed.
- A resident case study was secured.
- Campaign appeal was written.
- First Big Give announcement shared with our supporters via email newsletter.

August

- Follow-up conversations with potential pledgers continued.
- Pledger commitments secured.

November

- Campaign awareness reinforced through reminder emails and social media posts.
- Meetings and phone calls held with donors who typically give around Christmas to encourage Big Give donations.
- Staff encouraged to update their email signatures to promote the campaign.

September

- Support sought from other teams to identify a suitable case study for the campaign.

December

- Campaign activity intensified with social media posts and email newsletters throughout campaign week.
- Promotion supported by in-person engagement, including:
 - Carol concerts
 - Talks delivered by the Head of Fundraising and Communications at business networking events

Setting the Target

In line with Big Give guidance for first-time participants, and in recognition of our limited prior insight into supporter appetite at both pledge level and during campaign week, we took a cautious and considered approach to target-setting. We capped our first-year target at £35,000 to demonstrate our ability to deliver the campaign successfully, fulfil the process requirements, and build a strong foundation for future participation.

Pledge Breakdown



Total number of pledges: 10



Total value of pledges: £8,750



Pledges ranged from £100 to £5,000

Pledger types:



Individuals: 8 pledges



Corporate: 1 pledge

Securing Pledgers

As this was Jimmy's first time taking part in the Big Give, securing pledgers was a new and critical part of our planning. We focused on supporters who already had a strong relationship with Jimmy's and had previously shown the capacity to give.

We started by identifying corporate and individual donors who had given £500 or more in a year (cumulatively) over the past five years. To widen our reach, we then included donors who had given £100 or more in a year. This gave us a realistic but varied pool of potential pledgers to approach.

All pledger emails were sent directly from Outlook rather than through Mailchimp, as we wanted the outreach to feel personal and considered. This approach worked well as it allowed us to clearly explain the Big Give model, why match funding matters, and how pledgers could play a key role in helping us double the impact of public donations.

By emailing 40 supporters directly, we successfully reached our pledger target of £8,750 within the required timeframe. The response was encouraging, with donors showing genuine interest in being part of a new initiative and enthusiasm for the opportunity to have their support go even further.

This process also brought some unexpected benefits. Reaching out in this way helped us reconnect with a section of our database we hadn't engaged with recently and update donor records. The exercise strengthened our data and improved our approach to stewardship going forward.

Securing pledgers for the Big Give gave us greater confidence in this model, and laid strong foundations for building and expanding pledger relationships in future campaigns.

Securing a case study

It was great to involve some of our services colleagues in this project. Our Co-Production Coordinator interviewed one of our residents, Adam, and his story became the backbone of the campaign, featured across all our channels.

Adam's story was then written as an appeal by one of our volunteers, providing a clear, engaging template that strengthened messaging and saved staff capacity.

Adam's Story

(Told by Alice, our Co-production Coordinator)

When I first met Adam, he had been sleeping rough for over a year and a half. He stayed on Midsummer Common because a cow trough with a working tap was the only place he could wash. He'd lost his relationship, battled cancer, and was drinking just to get through the day. *"You think you're in control until you realise you aren't,"* he told me.

When Adam came to Jimmy's, we gave him something simple but life-changing: **a bed, a door that locked, and people who cared.**

"You have your own key, your own shower... it was perfect."

It wasn't easy. He was drinking heavily, but he asked for help - and with support from Jimmy's and our partners, he began detox and rehab. Recovery was tough, but he kept going. Moving into one of our move-on houses made a huge difference.

"It's quiet here. Having a key to a safe space has made all the difference."

Now, Adam is sober. He walks in the park, feeds the ducks with his grandchildren, and has reconnected with his family.

This Christmas, he's invited his two sons to dinner - something he didn't think would ever happen again.

"Last year I spent Christmas alone. This year, I'll be with family. That means everything."



Campaign Execution

Launch and Momentum

The campaign launched with real momentum, with donations coming in rapidly as soon as the Big Give page went live. The urgency created by the time limit and match funding availability proved to be a powerful motivator, and we reached our £35,000 target in under 48 hours - far ahead of the planned seven-day campaign window. This early success demonstrated both strong supporter engagement and the effectiveness of our pre-campaign communications.

Supporter Journey

Supporters were guided through a clear and simple journey:

- **Pre-campaign:** Awareness-building via newsletters and social media
- **Launch:** Clear calls to action highlighting the limited-time opportunity to double donations
- **Campaign week:** Regular updates showing progress, reinforcing urgency, and celebrating milestones

Messaging consistently focused on the immediate impact of donations, the importance of winter support, and how match funding could help move people away from rough sleeping and towards stable housing.

Real-Time Adaptation

As donations exceeded expectations, communications were adapted in real time to reflect progress, celebrate success, and encourage supporters to help push the campaign beyond its original target. Even after the £35,000 goal was reached, we continued to promote the campaign, resulting in a final net total of £45,487.18. This responsive approach helped maintain momentum and maximise income.



Communications and Marketing

Channels Used

Newsletters

October

November

December



30th October

Pre-campaign awareness raising began via our monthly newsletter, including artwork provided by the Big Give



6th November

Big Give announcement with a focussed message to our supporters about the fundamentals of the campaign



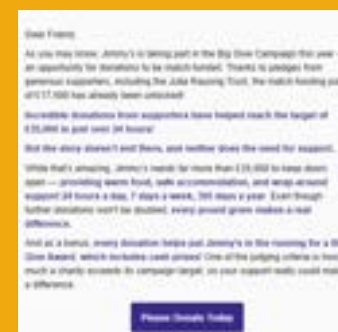
2nd December

Campaign launch directing people immediately to start donating



20th November

Pre-campaign reminder with the aim to keep the idea of donating to Jimmy's Cambridge via the Big Give in people's minds



5th December

Final push, despite having reached our target we wanted to encourage people to keep giving

Communications and Marketing

Channels Used

Social Media

Posts on LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram



Website

Donate button linked directly to the Big Give page



Campaign Week Activity



Panned Cross Promotion

We worked with the team at BBC Radio Cambridgeshire on a project to share the stories of pet ownership and homelessness in December. As a result of our good relationship with the team, we were able to align this coverage to go live during the Big Give campaign week. Alongside interviews with residents and our Head of Services, our Head of Fundraising and Communications joined the morning presenter live on the launch day to promote the Big Give to their listeners.

Strategic Event Timing

As part of our 30th Anniversary events we planned our inaugural Carol Concert in December 2025. Knowing we planned to take part in the Big Give, we made a strategic decision to host the concert during the campaign week, directing donations made on the night or inspired by the event, through the Big Give portal. Posters and event booklets included QR codes linking directly to the Big Give page (see below), and the Head of Fundraising & Communications spoke during the event to encourage donations. Although the target had already been reached by this point, supporters were encouraged to continue giving, contributing to the campaign's overall success.

From left to right: front cover of the booklet, back cover of the booklet, and poster displayed around the venue.



Post Campaign Activity

After the campaign ended, we focused on thanking people properly and strengthening relationships with those who made the campaign possible.

- All donors received a thank-you message, letting them know how much their support meant and the difference it would make.
- Pledgers were reminded to fulfil their pledges so that all match funding could be unlocked.
- Once pledges were received, we followed up with personal 'thank-yous' to recognise the crucial role pledgers played in the campaign's success.
- We also shared a post-campaign message on social media to publicly thank supporters, naming and tagging our Champion The Julia Rausing Trust, and celebrate what was achieved together.



Reflections and Learning

Taking part in the Big Give Christmas Challenge for the first time was a highly positive and valuable learning experience for Jimmy's. The campaign not only exceeded our financial expectations, but also gave us clear insight into how our supporters respond to match funding, time-limited appeals, and strong, human-centred storytelling. It demonstrated the power of urgency and clarity, and showed us that the Big Give can help us reach beyond our usual donor base.

Careful planning played a key role in the campaign's success. Investing time early on to secure pledgers, agree on a realistic first-year target, and develop core messaging meant we entered campaign week feeling confident rather than reactive.

Supporter engagement was one of the strongest aspects of the campaign. Donors clearly understood and were motivated by the opportunity to double their impact, with many choosing to give as soon as the campaign went live. We were especially encouraged by the number of first-time donors, indicating that the Big Give helped us reach new audiences. Internal engagement also made a difference, staff sharing campaign messages and updating email signatures helped extend reach and visibility at minimal cost.

At the same time, the campaign highlighted capacity as our biggest challenge. As a small team, balancing pledger relationships, communications, live monitoring during campaign week, and day-to-day responsibilities required careful prioritisation. While we successfully delivered the campaign, the experience showed that extra support would help the team. Engaging a volunteer copywriter is one way we could build on this in future years.

The campaign provided several important lessons that we will take forward. Starting early, particularly with pledger conversations and core content, significantly reduced pressure during campaign week and allowed us to focus on building momentum. Personal and direct engagement with pledgers proved highly effective, especially when we clearly communicated their role and the impact of match funding. Making full use of the limited match-funding window by sharing progress updates, celebrating milestones, and adapting messaging in response to donations helped maintain energy and urgency throughout the campaign. Where possible, linking the campaign to in-person events and external opportunities also added value and visibility.

We are already working on our plans to be involved in the Big Give Christmas Challenge 2026, and with this year's success we are planning to significantly increase our fundraising target. Based on our learning, we will prepare a full email journey in advance, broaden our pledger base, and build in more capacity for delivery and evaluation.

Overall, the Big Give Christmas Challenge has become a hugely valuable addition to Jimmy's fundraising approach. It enabled us to raise vital unrestricted income, attract new supporters, and mobilise generosity at a time when demand for our services is at its highest. Most importantly, the funding raised is helping people in Cambridge move away from rough sleeping and towards a safe place to call home. After such a strong first year, we are excited to build on this success and make the Big Give a core part of our fundraising strategy in the years ahead.

Taking part in the Big Give Christmas Challenge for the first time was a really exciting and educational experience for Jimmy's. Not only did the campaign exceed our expectations financially, it also gave us valuable insight into how our supporters respond to match funding, urgency, and clear storytelling.



**Thank you to everyone who made our
Big Give Christmas Campaign
possible and such a success!**

Contact

Jimmy's Cambridge,
1 East Road, Cambridge CB1 1BD
Registered Charity Number: 1058737



01223 576085



jimmyscambridge.org.uk



info@jimmyscambridge.org.uk



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