



Christmas
Challenge

BigGive

Big Give Christmas Challenge 2025
Rainbows Award Application



About Rainbows

Rainbows supports over 750 babies, children and young people with serious or terminal condition across the East Midlands - as well as 2,250 parents, siblings and family members who walk that journey alongside them.

We provide end-of-life, respite and wraparound community care at our hospice, in hospital and in the family home. For 31 years, Rainbows has been there when families need us most, and in the last three years alone, the number of families we support has tripled.

We only receive 13% of our funding from the government, meaning for the budget year 2025/26 we need to raise £8.5 million to sustain and grow our services.

“Our first impressions of Rainbows were how un-clinical and un-hospital like it is. Before entering this world, I was one of those people that thought hospice only meant end-of-life care. Rainbows is so amazing. It’s so bright, it’s so colourful and there’s so much to do. It’s like a home from home.”

- Claire, Florence’s Mummy

Florence

Our Christmas Appeal

Historically our Christmas Appeal has been primarily managed by our Individual Giving Team and targeted at our regular donors, lottery players, potential major donors and previous appeal donors.

Other areas of our Income Generation Team didn't tend to get involved, other than sharing the appeal story with their audiences. We tended to focus the appeal on a family's story, rather than a service.

An appeal mailing was sent to these people alongside HTML emails and social media promotion. The appeal launched around mid-November and ran for approx 6 weeks. donations were collected via cheque, bank transfer, phone and cash. In 2024, our appeal raised £35,819 including gift aid.

But this year...

We wanted to do things differently. We wanted to bring our fundraising teams together behind one joint focus and to energise our supporters in the same way. We wanted to focus their support on one of our crucial services and show how they are making an impact, whilst still sharing a powerful story from one of our families.

We knew we had the potential to go further with our Christmas Appeal and knew that the Big Give could help us do it.



Freddie



Stage One - The Application

In the beginning, there were just two team members working on the Big Give, our Trusts and Philanthropy Manager and our Partnerships Development and Events Manager, who has had experience of taking part in the Big Give at a previous charity.

We planned to extend this into the team further into the process if our application was approved, as a number of new team members had only just started or posts were due to be filled at the time of the initial planning.

Deciding our focus

We used our cost model to identify which service area needed additional funding and considered what would be suitable for a digital marketing campaign.

Our Hospice at Home service was introduced 5 years ago and is seeing an increasing demand. It requires a large amount of funding, but isn't featured as heavily in our general marketing as other elements of our work. Given the nature of this service, we have less content readily available to share, and it represents an incredibly emotional aspect of our work at Rainbows.

We felt that focusing on Hospice at Home would help the campaign stand out from our usual marketing, so it felt like a good fit.

Stage One - The Application

Our Trusts and Philanthropy Manager and our Partnerships Development and Events Manager, worked together to write our application to the Big Give. We each have different areas of expertise and our knowledge combined helped to produce a comprehensive overview of our campaign.

We made sure our Hospice at Home team and Marketing team were also happy with the wording we used and the focus of the campaign before it was submitted.

We felt it was possible to reach a £100,000 target and wanted to be ambitious with this project. This would fund two Hospice at Home nurses and their associated travel and equipment costs.



Rainbows Hospice at Home Team

Campaign Aims

- Encourage existing low-level major donors and trusts to support us in a new way as pledgers and incentivise them to increase their gift.
- Incentivise Corporate and Community supporters to fundraise for us at Christmas ahead of the Christmas rush.
- Acquire 100 new individual giving donors.
- Have an average donation value of £20
- Increase our reach on social media with varied and engaging campaign content that stood out from our usual posts.
- Experiment with a new paid social media campaign run for us by a digital marketing agency to attract a new donor audience for the charity.
- Increase the campaign reach by asking corporate supporters and individuals with a large social media following to share it.

Stage Two - Matched Funding

Part One: Get £25,000 in Pledges

The next stage was to gain £25,000 in pledged matched funding from Rainbows donors. We undertook analysis of our supporters to identify who we would approach, this included Trusts, low level Major Donors and Corporate Supporters who had previously made unrestricted donations at Christmas time. We selected these supporters as we knew Trusts would be much less likely to donate during the Week of Giving and could be more predictable in when they would donate.

We currently have another capital appeal running at the moment which our Major Donors had already been contacted about, so we felt it was only suitable to do an ask to our lower level Major Donors who hadn't already been contacted about the capital appeal.

We created a one page document to send to our prospective pledgers which outlined how the campaign worked and what the campaign would be funding. This was then sent by the fundraiser who had the relationship with the supporter via phone call or email.



Outcomes

£25,000 target achieved!

+ £1,500 Gift Aid

9 Pledgers

**2 Companies, 2 Trusts,
5 Major Donors**

**3 donation uplifts
Donors increased the
amount they donated
last year by £3,500**

80% £1k or over

Stage Two - Matched Funding

We ensured our pledgers were sincerely thanked for their commitment to our campaign and were kept up to date with the progress. We also shared videos and content with them that was shared during the week of giving. This was not only good donor stewardship as it made them feel involved in the whole journey, but also gave them the opportunity to promote the final stage of fundraising to their network should they wish to.

Part Two: Get £25,000 in Big Give Champion Funding

The next stage in securing our matched funding was then to wait for our application to be considered by the Big Give Champions, who have the potential to fund an additional £25,000, making our matched funding pot £50,000 in total.



Outcome £15,000 Champion funding secured!

We were successful in securing £15,000 from The Reed Foundation! Whilst this is lower than what we had hoped for and reduced our overall campaign target to £80,000, we were proud to have received such a substantial donation from a new donor, whose criteria we wouldn't usually fit for trust applications.

We also read that The Big Give saw a 28% increase in Champion funding requested in 2025 compared to the previous year, and whilst the amount of Champion funding available also increased, it still left a gap. As a result some Champions chose to partially fund campaigns so they could support as many charities as possible. This left us feeling more positive and grateful that as a first timer we had received 60% of the requested amount.

Stage Three - The Week of Giving

Planning

While we were waiting to hear back from the Big Give about our Champion funding, we started to involve the wider team in conversations about the campaign. We created a Big Give Working Group which included members from the following teams:

- **Marketing**
- **Individual Giving**
- **Corporate Fundraising**
- **Community Fundraising**
- **Trusts & Philanthropy**
- **Supporter Experience**

The goal was to use experience from across the department and bring them together behind a joint campaign, just like we were bringing our donors together behind one joint goal. We involved people at different stages of the campaign where it was suitable for them to input with their expertise. We set monthly meetings so we always had a consistent bookmark in the calendar to discuss the progress of the campaign and added in additional team members when necessary.

When doing our initial planning we discussed how we were going to maximise interacting with each different donor base to encourage participation from existing donors, whilst also attracting new ones. We wanted to change our tone of voice for the campaign, which is usually friendly and upbeat to powerful, emotional and hard hitting. We also wanted our imagery to be stronger and less colourful to make it stand out from our usual content.

Various team members attended the webinars hosted by the Big Give, we found them really useful for guiding us through the process and learning from other charities. We also found the case studies on the Big Give website and the Big Give Fundraising Chat Facebook group helpful for planning our campaign.



Stage Three - The Week of Giving

Planning

We had to consider how we were going to align the Big Give with our existing Christmas Appeal. We decided to only send our traditional appeal letters to donors we didn't have email consent for and segments of our donor demographic who hadn't donated online previously. We also delayed our appeal letters slightly so delivery was in line with the Week of Giving.

We chose to focus the campaign for both the Big Give and our general Christmas Appeal letter on one family's story, so we could take our donors on a journey and keep the messaging consistent.

This was the story of Freddie, an incredibly brave little boy, who at the age of 10 was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer. He battled for two years, but at the age of 12 he died peacefully in his own home, with his Mum and Dad, Sister, Bessie, and his cat Nutmeg by his side, just as he had wished. Our Hospice at Home Team were able to help Freddie's family fulfil their promise to keep him at home until his funeral.

We wanted our donors to get to know this amazing little boy and his family. We knew that if you heard their story and how Rainbows we able to make that devastating time a tiny bit easier, it would be hard to not want to donate. Freddie's story is an incredibly powerful one and we are so grateful to his family for allowing us to share it to raise funds for future families who will sadly need this support.

Freddie

Stage Three - The Week of Giving

Marketing

As a team, we built an initial master plan of all the avenues we could market the campaign which was a live document and then added to it as we went along. Below are all the ways we marketed the Big Give campaign.

Digital

- HTML emails
- Social media - organic & paid advertising
- Video content recorded with family
- Website content - campaign info on homepage
- Website donate button redirected
- Press exposure through online newspapers

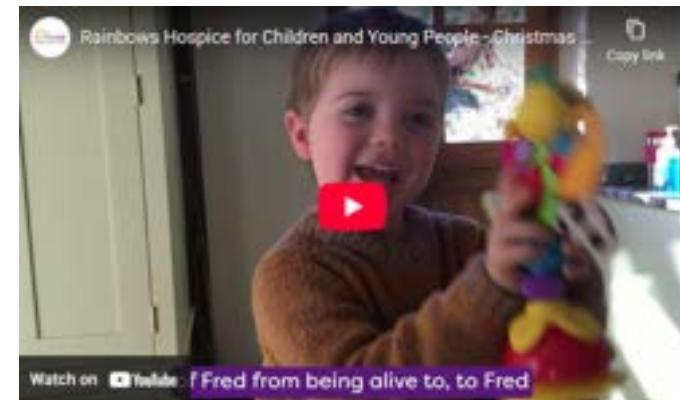


Retail - 10 charity shops

- Shop staff briefed on campaign
- TV screens had information about the campaign
- Campaign postcards given to customer during week

Hospice

- TV screen in hospice had info about campaign
- Campaign postcards on reception
- Info in internal newsletter & encouragement to share
- Staff-wide 'The Big Dress Up' fundraiser during week
- Freddie Friday - chef's cooked Freddie's favourite meal



Above: Campaign video and postcard

Stage Three - The Week of Giving

Marketing

Events

- Campaign video showed at our Santa Run which took place during the week
- Campaign ads on big screen & mentions by compere
- Campaign postcards given out at event

Corporate & Community supporters

- Document created to send before the campaign started to encourage them to fundraise in the run up and donate during the week - sent to select companies and groups.
- Those who said they were interested were then sent a specific Fundraising Ideas & FAQ's document
- Fundraisers identified supporters who were due to donate soon and asked them ahead of time to do it through the Big Give so their donation got doubled
- Large companies with big followings were asked to promote it during the week to their own audiences.



Above: Santa Runners watching Freddie's video



Above: Extracts from Corporate and Community doc

Stage Three - The Week of Giving

Marketing

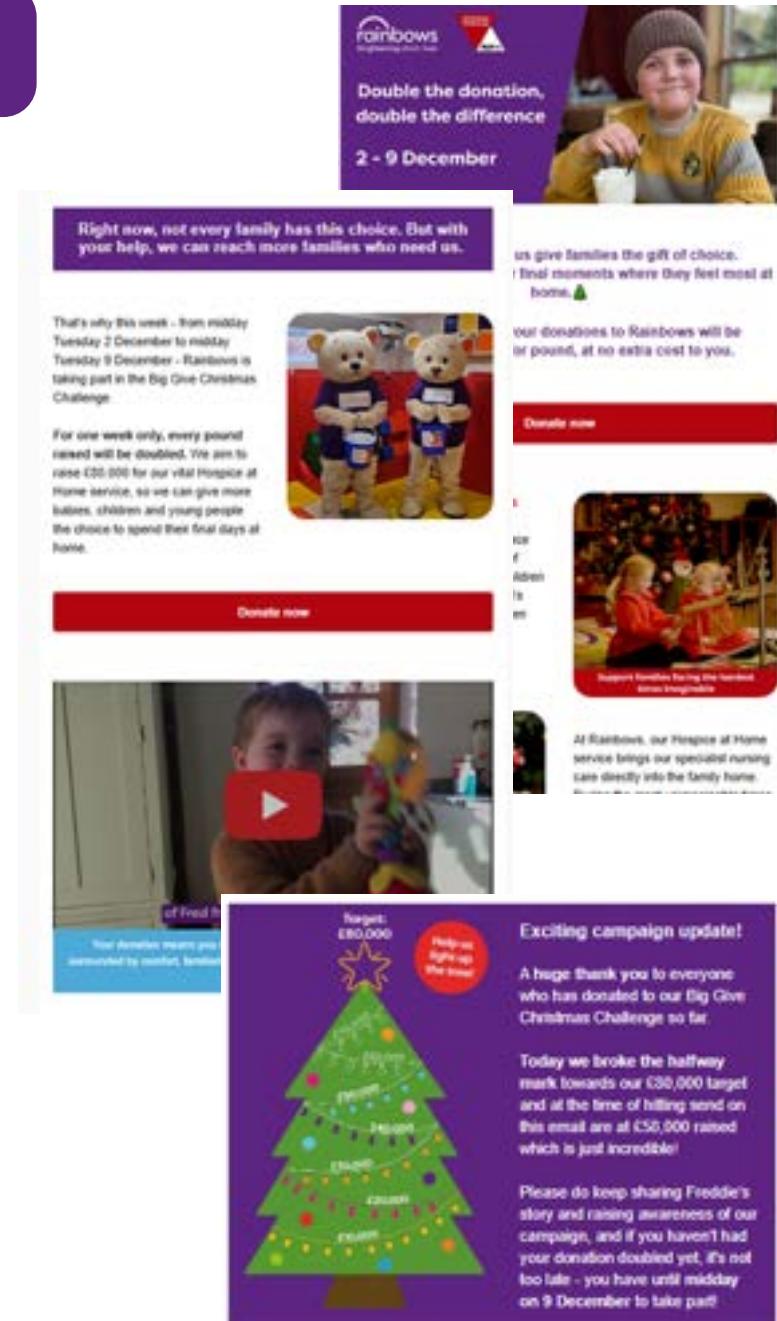
Email Marketing

We have 10,000 general email subscribers and 1,000 corporate subscribers, to whom we sent three emails during the week - one to launch it, a mid-way marker and a final reminder. The emails included powerful wording and imagery, our campaign video, quotes, a link to Freddie's story, plus multiple buttons to donate.

Around a 1,000 of these supporters also received our Christmas Appeal letter by post. We segmented our data and used slightly different wording in their emails. We chose not to mention the Big Give in the letters, as the mailing also went to an additional 5,000 supporters and ran throughout December.

To ensure all donors could still take part, we redirected our website donate button during the Week of Giving to our Big Give campaign page and asked telephone donors if they would like to donate via the Big Give.

In our halfway email we updated supporters on campaign progress while keeping the rest of the content the same, aside from header imagery. As we had already surpassed half of our target, we thanked those who had already donated and encouraged continued support.



Above: Screenshots of some of our email campaigns

Stage Three - The Week of Giving

Marketing

Email Marketing

By our final reminder email, we had already reached our target, so we adapted our messaging and set a new goal of £100,000. We explained that while donations would no longer be match funded, they would still make an incredible impact to our families.

We also shared Freddie's story in our December volunteer e-shot to 287 volunteers. While we couldn't directly ask this audience for donations due to consent, it helped raise awareness of the campaign.

Outcomes

- Email open rates were above average and drove over half of appeal landing page visitors.
- Supporters who received a printed letter were twice as engaged on email.
- Thank you email very high open rate, showing value for relationship building.

Email marketing analysis

Launch day

- General audience
 - No letter - 42.8% opens, 1.4% clicks
 - With letter - 48.6% opens, 6% clicks
- Corporate audience - 28.5% opens, 5.3% clicks

Halfway mark

- General audience
 - No letter - 42.6% opens, 0.9% clicks
 - With letter - 47.5% opens, 3.8% clicks
- Corporate audience - 25.6% opens, 3.6% clicks

Final Reminder

- General audience (audiences were combined for this email) - 42.9% opens, 1% clicks
- Corporate audience - 27.1% opens, 5.3% clicks



Click the underlined text to view our email campaigns

Stage Three - The Week of Giving

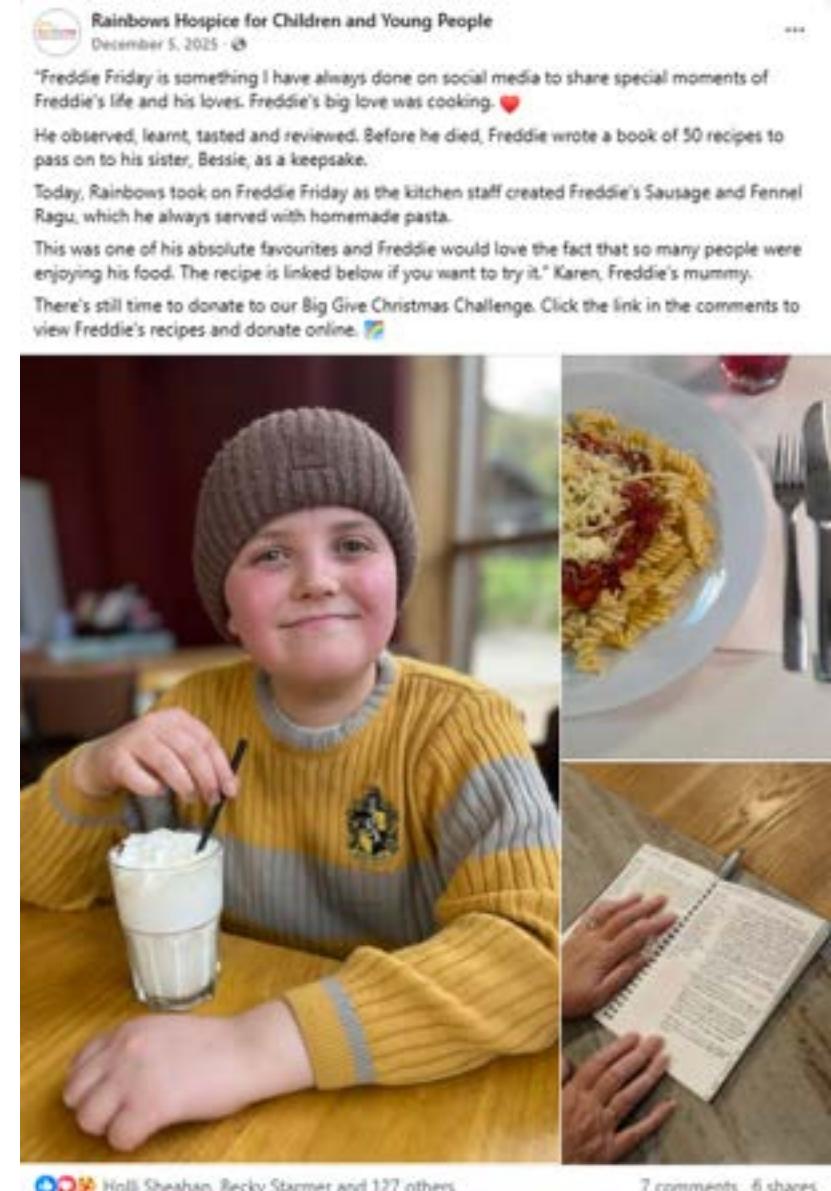
Marketing

Social Media - Organic

Ever since Freddie died, his family have celebrated 'Freddie Friday' to share special moments of his life. We wanted to do our own Freddie Friday during the campaign week and linked it with his passion for cooking.

Our hospice chefs prepared one of Freddie's favourite dishes from the recipe book he made for his little sister, serving it for lunch for our families and staff. Not only was this a heartfelt tribute to Freddie, but it offered a more personal perspective on the campaign from the charity's viewpoint.

To get as many people across Rainbows involved with this campaign, we organised 'The Big Dress' up during the week as a staff fundraiser. Not only did this help raise funds but it was great to show publicly how the Rainbows team were all getting behind the campaign.



Stage Three - The Week of Giving

Marketing Social Media - Organic

We spent a lot of time planning our social media posts for the week to ensure we had varied and engaging content which would allow our followers to get to know Freddie and inspire them to make a donation.

As a teaser we posted the Big Give's campaign video the day before as we felt it would help our followers trust in the campaign when we started posting about it. Having recognisable celebrities involved also gives the campaign some excitement too.

We had numerous videos from Freddie's family, including one from his little sister Bessie. We also had videos from our Hospice at Home team and one made by our Young People which was more light hearted. We recorded a halfway mark and a thank you video on the day we hit target, as well as another thank you video which included Freddie's dad when the campaign ended. We shared lots of content to our stories and kept on top of our comments.

Video library

[Freddie's Story - Main Campaign Video](#)

[Young People -Double donation](#)

[After Freddie Died](#)

[Hospice at Home Nurse](#)

[Halfway Mark](#)



[**Click to watch some of our videos!**](#)

Organic engagement

Facebook

Views - 82,732

Engagements - 6,104

Interactions - 1,249

52.3% of views from
non-followers

Instagram

Views - 26,547

Reach - 11,041

Interactions - 698

46.4% views from
non-followers

Stage Three - The Week of Giving

Marketing

Social Media - Paid

Our Marketing Team also used this as an opportunity to test and learn about how our audiences respond to different types of marketing. This is what we did that was new for the Big Give:

UTM links - in QR codes and links

Audience profiling on Meta

AB testing on Meta

Awareness/conversion retargeting on Meta

We used UTM links to track where our conversions came from and give us a better idea of which marketing avenues are best for campaigns like this.

We invested in the audience profiling piece of work by getting a Digital Marketing agency to create a lookalike audience for us in the run up to the campaign and 'warm them up' with awareness posts. Our campaign then went live to this audience to drive new donors to Rainbows.

Outcomes

- Paid social campaign was 98% driven by Facebook 2% Instagram, whereas organic social was 75% Facebook, 25% Instagram.
- Paid Facebook audience was older (mostly 55-65+) compared with organic Facebook audience (mostly 35-54). So older supporters are more influenced by digital adverts than young.
- On Facebook, content was watched for a total of 10 days - 200 users watched for 1 minute, so the videos were more successful on organic (videos on paid social needed more awareness time.)
- QR codes were scanned from 49 letters, 45 postcards and 13 posters (print still matters!).

Stage Three - The Week of Giving

Marketing

Social Media - Paid

Testing 'emotional' vs 'factual' language

- Emotional outperforms factual x10 on awareness (impressions)
- We got 62,704 impressions in one week (81% from emotional ads)
- Emotional ads got 4.49% click-through (well above the baseline of 1-2%)

Testing 'static' vs 'carousel'

- Carousels outperforms static x10 on awareness (impressions)
- Static perform better for conversions

Press

We did PR around our entire Christmas Appeal using different family's stories, including the Big Give and Freddie's story. In total we had 26 pieces of coverage with a potential reach of 1.1 billion. The Big Give had 10 pieces of coverage which went across all counties, with a potential reach of 1.8 million people and advertising value of £3,000.



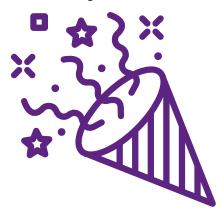
STATIC



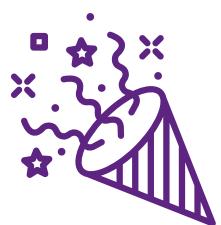
CAROUSEL



Fundraising Outcomes



£47,845 Week of Giving
+£4240.25 Gift Aid



£40,000 Matched Funding
+£1,500 Gift Aid



TOTAL RAISED

including Gift Aid

£93,585.25!!

Target reached in just over 3 days!

Donation Analysis

Community Fundraising

- 18 donations total
- £14,210 donated
- 1 new donor

Corporate Fundraising

- 23 donations total
- £14,428 donated
- + £543.75 Gift Aid
(from employees who personally donated)
- 3 new donors

Individual Giving

- 458 donations total
- £19,207 donated
- + £3696.50 Gift Aid
- 259 new donors (bringing in £10,653)
- Average gift £41.94

509 Donations Total

52% NEW donors



Freddie

Learnings



Now that we have a full team with all roles filled, plus experience of taking part in the Big Give across various Rainbows teams, it will be great to be able to start the process with a collaborative working group from the very start of the process.



Due to team changeover, we don't have very strong relationships with our Patrons and Ambassadors, but we hope to rekindle these over the next year. It would be great to get them involved in future campaigns such as through campaign videos and sharing with their networks to grow our reach.



We faced challenges with data from the Big Give, which required creating a new process for importing it into our database. Limited donor information made it difficult to match donors accurately, but we now better understand the data format for next year.



Limited data also makes it difficult to analyse the donor base accurately as we can't match some of the donors. While it's brilliant that 52% of our donors were new donors, it's likely that in fact this is a lower percentage and we just weren't able to match those on our database already.



Those who received a letter as well as an email had a much high click-through rate, perhaps we want to consider expanding how many letters we send to our email audience.

Learnings



We would like to be more prepared with our supporter journey for donors post campaign, with emails already drafted and a plan for their communications going forwards more concrete. Again, due to timeframes we were quite reactive with this and it will be great to have time for more considering the best approach.



It was interesting to see the rapid drop off in donations once we had reached our target and they were no longer being doubled. We believe if we had received our full amount of Champion funding we would have hit our original target of £100,000. Next year we would consider trying to 'top up' our match funding pot with more pledgers to help us reach it.



It would have been preferable to have the documents for the corporate and community supporters earlier so we could contact them with more notice. Now we have the documents from this year they will be easier to recreate and circulate sooner.



One of our concerns when deciding to take part in the Big Give was the impact it may have on our normal Christmas Appeal and whether it would confuse the messaging. In fact, our separate Christmas Appeal raised £38,409 (inc Gift Aid) in addition to the Big Give - £2,590 more than the previous year! We now know that half of our donors to the Big Give were new people, meaning it's a great initiative to attract new people to supporting Rainbows.



Freddie



Freddie and Bessie

Learnings

-  We believe we could have reached our original £100k target, had we received the full amount of Champion funding. This has given us the confidence for 2026 to potentially top up our matched funding pot with extra pledgers.
-  We received a donation after the campaign from a corporate supporter who we had established a relationship with during the year but they hadn't yet made a monetary contribution. They said that seeing the emails about the campaign had got them thinking about the fact they hadn't yet donated and inspired them to do so. It's interesting to see the ripple effect the campaign is having!
-  It would be good to do a teaser about the campaign a bit further ahead than one day before. We don't want to lose the momentum but it would have more potential to reach people.
-  We were so focused on hitting our target, that we hadn't really planned what we would do once we did! We had to be very reactive in adapting our messaging and celebrating/thanking our supporters. It would be better to do this ahead of the campaign so we have more time to consider our messaging and have it ready.
-  The reach of our organic social posts were to around 50% non-followers, so we shouldn't assume these are just aimed for an audience who already knows a lot about Rainbows.

Conclusion

Taking part in the Big Give has been a hugely positive and unifying experience for Rainbows. We brought our Income Generation and Marketing teams together behind one shared goal, creating a truly collaborative campaign with energy, momentum and a clear sense of purpose. At the same time, we brought our supporters together behind one clear focus – Hospice at Home – giving them a powerful, shared mission to rally around.

By focusing on one vital service, we created a compelling, emotionally driven campaign that showed supporters exactly how their generosity makes a difference. This clarity helped us tell a powerful story, inspire action, and build a strong connection between donors and the families we support.

The Big Give campaign truly demonstrated the four Rainbows values in action:



Teams working together across the department behind one joint goal.



Putting families, supporters and donors at the heart of everything we did.



Setting an ambitious target and pushing ourselves to go further.



Embracing a new fundraising campaign, learning quickly and adapting throughout.

Conclusion

The campaign exceeded expectations, raising over £93,000 with more than 50% new donors, while testing new and more ambitious marketing approaches.

We have taken away valuable learnings, including the importance of building in more lead time for corporate and community supporters, planning post-campaign supporter journeys earlier, and preparing messaging in advance for when targets are reached. We now better understand how our audiences respond to emotional storytelling, paid social, and integrated print and digital marketing.

These insights give us a strong foundation to plan an even more successful Big Give campaign next year – with greater confidence, stronger supporter journeys, and an even bigger impact for the families, like Freddie's, who rely on Rainbows.

We're excited to take everything we've learned and turn it into an even more impactful Big Give Christmas Challenge campaign in 2026!



Freddie



rainbows.co.uk

Rainbows is registered as Cope Children's Trust in England and Wales. Registered Charity No. 1014051.
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