Be a Tooth Fairy this Christmas
– Dentals for dogs
How Forever Hounds Trust had their best Christmas Challenge ever!

A bit of background...
Forever Hounds Trust is dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation and rehoming of unwanted and abused greyhounds and lurchers. We find forever homes for around 400 of these special dogs every year and are entirely reliant on the donations and the fundraising efforts of our volunteers and supporters.

What’s the tooth fairy got to do with anything?
We face many costs in the course of our rescue and rehabilitation work – from providing warm dry kennel spaces to buying petrol for our vans that transport our dogs to safety. When choosing this year’s Big Give project, we looked at which of our previous appeal topics have been popular, what case studies we had that were really engaging, and of course, where we most needed the funds.

Ultimately we wanted to choose an issue that really affects our hounds but one that our human supporters could also identify with. Funding for the dental care we provide was a natural choice - over 70% of the dogs we rescue come into our care with severe periodontal disease, and the agony of toothache is something we can all identify with.

As our project focussed on some fairly grisly dental photos and case studies, we added the tooth fairy element to lighten up the campaign and add some humour!

Calling all fairies
Planning was a critical part of our marketing to ensure we had a range of different communications reaching our different target audiences at what is typically a busy time of year for our fundraising.

We took a broad approach to ensure our marketing encompassed a range of potential donors, and ensured our communications were aimed at several groups from our warmest existing donors to new audiences such as celebrities and social media user groups.

What we’ve learned - creative marketing and engagement techniques that worked... and some that didn’t!
Forever Hounds Trust has taken part in the Big Give Christmas Challenge for several years. This year, we experienced our highest amount of donors and generated the highest amount we’ve ever raised.

We believe our success this year is down to a combination of investing more time in planning our communications, being more creative, trying new things and segmenting and interacting more with our various audience groups.
Here’s what helped get us such great results:

Getting in early
This year we spent more time planning communications that publicised the Challenge ahead of the campaign, than we have done in previous years.

We used our social media pages and website to count down the days to go a week ahead of Giving Tuesday and we sent a ‘Save the Date’ card out to previous Big Givers, our volunteers, supporters and trustees. This helped create a buzz around the Challenge and let people know what was expected and how and when to donate to ensure we would qualify for match funding.

Not being star struck!
As a relatively small charity we don’t tend to have much ‘celebrity’ support but we thought the Christmas Challenge was a great way to try and engage some celebs.

We compiled a list of thirty famous people we knew had some interest in dogs and rather than sending a standard letter asking for a donation, contacted them directly via twitter and asked for a retweet for our campaign link. We were thrilled to get a retweet from musician Fiona Ann Bennet who has 51,000 followers – fifteen times our own twitter reach!

Ignoring the advice about working with animals
We posted several live videos on our Facebook account over the course of Giving Tuesday. These brought the work of Forever Hounds Trust to life, following our volunteers taking a dog to safety, meeting new homers and introducing some of our dogs needing homes.

While the saying ‘never work with children or animals’ exists for good reason we actually noticed a spike in our online donations that coincided with our very excited pup Gracie having a little wee on the carpet!

Show us your gnashers!
We wanted our supporters to really engage with our campaign and start spreading the word to their own networks. We know the majority of our supporters are dog owners and love sharing pictures of their hounds with us.

We asked our supporters to post pictures of their own dogs with lovely sparkly teeth on social media and include the hashtag #toothfairy plus a link to our Christmas Challenge. Here’s handsome Ash with his shiny gnashers whose photo got a whopping 81 likes – many more that our facebook posts normally generate!
**Making it personal**

Our supporters engage with us for many reasons, for example, some are major donors, others rehome a dog from us or volunteer with us. We wanted to trial targeting a very specific audience segment to see if quality could equal quantity when it comes to online marketing.

Our trial targeted what we felt would be a warm audience – those people who had rehomed a dog from us in the past twelve months. We sent a personalised email enquiring how their dog was settling in, reminding them of our post homing support service and then a ‘soft’ ask detailing our tooth fairy campaign and asking them to consider helping another hound get the help they need to find their forever home.

Our ‘happy homer’ e-shot had a mailing list of just 209 but this was opened by 64% of recipients – more than double our normal e-news open rate, and generated donations from new supporters.

**Keeping it simple**

Periodontal disease, it’s causes, impact and treatment can be lengthy to explain (and not particularly engaging!) so we devised simple infographics to get the message across on our facebook and twitter pages.

This one particularly was shared widely and we feel sums up the issue fairly succinctly!

**A happy ending**

One of our case studies in our dental campaign was the story of Sophia, an eight-year-old ex-racing greyhound. A lifetime of neglect had left her with a mouth full of rotten teeth and painful abscesses. When she was rescued the vet said it was the worst case of dental disease she had ever seen in a greyhound and under general anaesthetic, Sophia had all of her bad teeth removed, leaving just her four canines.

Since the Christmas Challenge Sophia is enjoying life pain-free and has recently found her forever home. We’ve been sharing her second chance at life to our supporters via a fortnightly blog and e-newsletter to let people see the impact their donation has had.

Tales of Sophia’s adventures encountering new things (like sofas and TVs!) and tackling her first Christmas dinner with just four teeth have generated a really positive response. It’s shown our supporters how their donations really make a difference, and balanced out the more gruelling content of some of the cases of neglect and abuse we used in the campaign.
We had a fantastic response from our tooth fairies, but here’s what we learnt about what didn’t go quite so well...

It’s not an exact science
Some people who we targeted specifically, gave nothing, others who we hadn’t targeted at all gave lots! We made the best marketing plans we could with the data and time we had available but it’s never 100% predictable where all your donations will come from.

A robust marketing plan needs to consider both breadth and depth of communications. With our limited resource we will continue to trial new means of reaching different audience groups to see what works best.

It’s the most wonderfully busy time of the year!
Much of our fundraising income is generated towards the end of the calendar year as we promote our postal Christmas appeal, winter raffle, merchandise sales and sponsorship gifts to our supporters in November and December.

With the introduction of Facebook’s fundraising function this year and their own match funding offer on Giving Tuesday, ensuring our messaging and priorities were clear and consistent was particularly challenging.

We realised a bit too late that we should have involved our PR and communications staff earlier to ensure the Christmas Challenge was prioritised whilst match funding was available and to avoid bombarding our supporters with multiple asks in a short space of time.

We are thrilled with our Christmas Challenge result this year.
We’ve raised lots, learnt lots and are already planning next year’s campaign!
The support from the Big Give team has been amazing – thank you!