East African Playgrounds Christmas Challenge Awards application

East African Playgrounds is a UK registered charity, and since 2009 we have worked in disadvantaged communities across Uganda, giving children their childhood back through play. We use a repeatable model to:

- train teachers in the importance of play-based teaching for children’s learning
- train communities and parents in the importance of play for children’s development
- provide children in communities with high-quality, sustainable and child-centred playgrounds.

We’ve recently taken part in The Big Give Christmas Challenge, and are really proud of what we’ve achieved. We’ve managed to raise £15,129 in total, £7,832 of which were online donations, £2,000 from our Champion and £4,000 from pledgers.

Our motivations - why did we take part?

When we heard about the Christmas Challenge, at East African Playgrounds we were unsure whether to take part; we knew it was something that wasn’t worth doing unless we put lots of time and effort in. As a small, fairly young charity with only 6 UK staff we have many competing priorities for our time, and know we can’t do everything. But, after careful consideration we identified 5 main benefits for East African Playgrounds in taking part:

- **The chance to test something new.** We had already been considering trying out a Christmas appeal for the first time in 2017, and this would mean any supporters of the appeal could make their money go further.

- **Opportunity to access new trust/foundation funding and raise our profile.** We have recently set up a trusts and foundations funding stream, and as a charity little known by trusts and foundations, this was a way to profile our work for trusts who may not have open application programmes

- **To engage former volunteers who have never given.** Each summer since 2009 we have run a volunteering programme in Uganda for UK students, but historically have struggled to convert our former volunteers (‘alumni’) into donors

- **To increase donations from our regular givers.** We have a small pool of regular givers, but have not previously asked them to give in other ways. This was a chance to see what the response would be.

- **To transform social media likes to donations.** In common with many charities, many of our social media followers do not support the charity in any other way. This could be a way to convert social media ‘likes’ into actual donations.
Our approach for different audiences

Former volunteers (‘alumni’): through the Christmas Challenge we wanted our alumni to re-engage with the importance of our work (with the aim of recruiting them as regular givers post-Christmas Challenge). We thought the best way to do this would be to remind them of the amazing summer they spent in Uganda and that they are part of the East African Playgrounds family. To do this, we hit upon the idea of sharing a ‘exclusive’ downloadable PDF of recipes for several Ugandan dishes that they would’ve eaten in Uganda, put together by our beloved cooking staff, as a ‘thank you’ for anyone who donated over £20. During the lead up to the Challenge, we used a series of emails and social media posts to promote the fact they would have the exclusive opportunity to access the recipes and double their donation during the challenge. During the week of the challenge we used email, social media and text to encourage alumni to donate, with communications coming from various members of the team including the co-CEOs of the charity (emphasising the urgency of the campaign), whom the early alumni in particular would know very well from their time volunteering. This worked well, and 27 alumni gave a donation through the Big Give. Following the completion of the Christmas Challenge we ensured the PDF was sent out promptly by email.

Major donors: while we do not have many major donors, a few months before the Christmas Challenge week, we were lucky enough to have been introduced to a potential major donor a few months before the Christmas Challenge week, who had already been in discussions about supporting our work. By introducing the idea of taking part in the Christmas Challenge, we were able to show the donor the vital role they could play, by becoming the final ‘piece of the jigsaw’ by donating any funds still outstanding by the deadline, thus allowing us to access our Champion funds. This was achieved by a personal approach by phone and email by the CEOs.

Corporates: the co-CEOs approached our existing corporate supporters in Uganda personally to ask them to become pledgers, explaining in detail the opportunity to make their donations go twice as far and how the process worked. Two of our corporate supporters made pledges.

Regular givers: we wanted to trial an appeal to our existing regular givers; we weren’t sure if this was something they’d be receptive to or not. We structured a programme of tailored emailed communications to our regular donors, acknowledging how much we valued their existing support, but letting them know this was another way they could help us. We were pleased that through the Christmas Challenge, 8 of our regular donors gave additional donations.

Lapsed regular donors: we hoped the Christmas Challenge could be a way to encourage those who had lapsed from being a regular donor previously to begin giving again. We used tailored emails to acknowledge their previous support and ask to them to get involved again through the Christmas Challenge. 11 of our lapsed regular donors gave gifts during the week.

Trustees: before the Christmas Challenge most of our Trustees were not supporting us financially, although they do provide huge support in other ways. We suggested to all our Trustees that the Christmas Challenge was something we hoped that they’d support, with at least one letting us know beforehand that they’d make a donation. We hoped that this would encourage other trustees to give. As a result, 4 of our trustees, and 2 of our ex-trustees gave donations.
Social media supporters: while we have over 4,000 likes on our Facebook page and many followers on Twitter and Instagram, we do not tend to get much external engagement or financial support from these people, which we hoped to change. We thought that the Christmas Challenge could be a good way to change this. In the build up to the Christmas Challenge, we used scheduled posts, including videos on our social media to publicise the Christmas Challenge (as something to add to your Christmas present list) and also to promote the fact that the collection of recipes would be available for those donating over £20. 49 of our Christmas Challenge donors had not donated to us before, and many of them do ‘like’ us on Facebook which we hope means we have been successful in engaging some of these supporters.

Achievements
We were thrilled with how the Christmas Challenge went in 2017. It was even more successful than we’d hoped. We secured:

- £4,000 in pledges
- £2,000 in champion funds from The Reed Foundation – International
- £7,832 in online donations from 86 donors, £1,832 over our target
- Donations from 27 alumni
- Re-engagement from 11 lapsed donors
- Additional donations from 8 regular givers
- Donations from 4 trustees and 2 ex-trustees
- Donations from 49 new contacts
- Facebook reach of 2,500 during the Christmas Challenge week (usually 500) and Instagram reach of 500.

We are also hopeful that we will see further positive results in terms of regular giving sign-ups over the next few months.

Learning for next year
We already have ambitious plans in place for next year, to build on 2017’s success, which will include:

- Engagement with different groups in our supporter base including Rotary and Student Unions
- A blog post prior to the Christmas Challenge launch to further engage contacts
- Texts to contacts before and during the Challenge to further engage contacts and remind them to donate
- Additional social media updates and emails with live totals and hours remaining each day to increase feeling of urgency
- Higher targets for pledges and online donations to ensure more of our donations are matched
- A similar ‘reward’ for donations over £50, as well as £20 to encourage larger gift amounts
- ‘Scheduled’ donations from those we know will donate larger amounts, to maintain momentum through the week, to try and avoid ‘quiet days’
- A mass public ‘thank you’ at the end of the week so that more supporters feel appreciated.

The Christmas Challenge has been extremely successful for East African Playgrounds, and we really appreciate the opportunity to take part.

For more information on East African Playgrounds, please contact Suzie Rees on 07803 566184 or fundraiser@eastafricanplaygrounds.org

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