

Christmas Post for Scouts



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In 1981 the Government announced that charities could deliver Christmas cards during the period November 25th to January 1st and make a small charge for this service. In the weeks that lead up to Christmas thousands of Scouts, Leaders, Parents and Committee Members take on the responsible job of delivering Christmas Card Post that has been stamped with Scout stamps and posted in Scout posting boxes.

Planning

As with any Scout event planning pays dividends: in this instance the dividends are financial reward and successful public relations. Outline planning should begin in the late summer to ensure that an efficient and successful scheme is run.

The postal delivery area must be clearly defined. To say it covers a certain Scout District would not be understood by the public. A village or small town clearly defined by roads or similar boundaries is relatively easy to administer. At the other end of the scale, complete geographical areas could be covered by schemes involving many Groups and Districts working together.

Once the size of the scheme is decided upon the next stage of planning should take place in September/October and include:

1. Selection of sites for posting boxes
2. Building posting boxes
3. Considering stamp costs
4. Ordering stamps (if applicable)
5. Deciding methods of operation
6. Promoting the scheme

Sites for Posting Boxes

Posting boxes need to be situated in places where people will readily see them. Many schemes have found newsagents and businesses where people routinely call for daily or weekly shopping, libraries, old people's homes, community centres and church porches to be ideal. Some schemes may involve manning boxes in shopping areas on Saturday mornings.

Whatever system is used the posting boxes must be secure, clearly labelled and emptied on a regular basis. You can not expect the shopkeeper to empty the posting box for you.

Construction of Posting Boxes

You don't need to rival the postal authorities so large red structures are unnecessary. As a general rule the size of a posting box should be governed by the size of the catchment area. Please bear in mind that the bigger the posting box the more difficult it will be to find a shop willing to accept it.

Postal Charges

In general the charge levied for each card sent via the scheme is between half and three quarters the price of a second class stamp. If the scheme is operated by more than one Group discussions will be required as to how the money and responsibility will be divided between the Groups involved. Some Groups in an area will have more houses but less collecting points and Groups that cover the shopping centres may find that the

opposite is true. Some schemes also take about one penny per card towards District funds.

Ordering the Stamps

Possibly the only item not completely controlled by the Group is the production of stamps. If you operate a "trust scheme" (one where cards and money are put in the box together) it is only necessary to have a rubber stamp manufactured.

If your scheme sells stamps they must be produced in sufficient quantities to allow easy availability. Designs should be clear, show the stamp value and have some obvious indication of Scouting. A local printer would be able to advise on the best and most economical method of producing your designs. Many Groups find it more economical to produce two years stock of stamps in one go.

Publicity

Once sites have been agreed for the posting boxes, stamps ordered, and people have agreed to supervise and empty the posting boxes all that is now required is publicity for the scheme.

Publicity is essential and should be the specific responsibility of a person or team. Posters can be used in shops, windows and on public notice boards. Press releases may be required for local newspapers, radio and television. Letters can be written to parish magazines and even personal visits to old peoples' homes and community clubs are an option.

Further publicity can be obtained by way of a leaflet posted with all cards delivered in the first week of the scheme.

Sorting

Delivery rounds must be agreed upon and clear maps and lists of street names and numbers should be produced to make the sorting simple. You will need plenty of space and a number of cardboard boxes, "a raid" on the local

supermarket or shoe shop should provide you with the latter. Depending upon the size of the scheme the sort will be in three or four stages:

1. Sort the post into Group areas
2. Frank the cards
3. Sort the Group areas into delivery rounds
4. Sort each round by street name and numbers

Small schemes operated by a single Group need only need to complete stages 2-4.

During a sort you may come across cards that do not fall within your delivery area. These must either be passed to the Scout post team for the relevant area or consigned to the official postal authorities by affixing a second class stamp. Incomplete and incorrect addresses will inevitably occur. Telephone directories and local information may help to redirect these cards. It is much quicker for Venture Scouts and adults to do the sorting. Beaver Scouts, Cub Scouts and Scouts may be perfectly able, but time constraints normally make it impractical until the final delivery sort (stage 4).

Delivery

Delivering mail is a responsible act and mistakes and disappointment must be avoided at all cost.

BEAVER SCOUTS, CUB SCOUTS AND SCOUTS SHOULD ONLY DELIVER CHRISTMAS POST UNDER ADULT SUPERVISION AND ONLY DURING DAYLIGHT HOURS.

Finances

Whatever method is used to run the scheme, accurate records must be kept of all finances and should be incorporated into and audited with the annual accounts. If stamps are issued to people for sale an accurate return must be made; if money is put on trust into the posting box this must be carefully counted and recorded. Groups that use the trust method find they are always in pocket. Schemes that may bring the Group or

District annual income above the VAT threshold (around £50,000) should discuss their financial arrangements with their County Treasurer who will be able to give them advice. Many schemes donate part of the proceeds raised to a local charity. This is not only good public relations for the Groups involved but in addition, the charity concerned support Scouting by encouraging their members and supporters to use the postal scheme.

Duration of the Scheme

Most schemes operate for the second and third weeks of December finishing a few days before Christmas to allow the final cards to be sorted and delivered by December 24th.

Contacts

Further information can be obtained from the Fundraising Department:

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