

How Homelessness Charities Ran Christmas

Bigger budgets bought more ads. They didn't buy more time.



3.3×

as many creatives from the larger charities as from
the smaller ones

Bars show the median number of days a creative stayed live. Each side of the track runs to 30 days.

33 UK charities · 890 creatives · every ad they published on Meta between
1 November and 31 December 2025

Six Things Worth Knowing Before Your Christmas Campaign Goes Live

60%

The median charity delivered 60% of its reach to people over 55. Only one in seven creatives with a face shows anyone that age.

Delivery across eight charities · depiction across 442 tagged creatives

3.3×

Extra budget showed up as more ads, not as longer-running ones.

Larger charities ran 3.3× the creatives, with identical lifespans, compared to smaller charities

15d

The typical Christmas creative runs 15 days, the same whether the charity is large or small.

Median across 890 creatives · identical in both small and large charities

+16.6%

An ad with a tangible ask sitting next to a Donate Now button stayed live longer.

Based on 29 ads across seven charities

−13.7%

Videos whose copy and opening frame lead on statistics came down sooner.

21 creatives across five charities

13d

The sector's awareness stage runs about two weeks.

Learn More 13 days (56 ads) · Donate Now 19 days (249 ads)

The 33 Charities In This Report

Every figure in this report comes from the ads these charities published on Meta between 1 November and 31 December 2025. If your organisation is on this list, your own numbers are sitting behind every chart in it.

Shelter	Emmaus UK	Bethany Christian Trust
Crisis	Depaul UK	The Connection at St Martin's
St Mungo's	Framework	Thames Reach
Centrepont	Porchlight	Launchpad Reading
Social Bite	Alongside	Shelter Cymru
New Horizon Youth Centre	Glass Door	Llamau
Single Homeless Project	The Wallich	Changing Lives
akt	Caring in Bristol	Aberdeen Cyrenians
St Martin-in-the-Fields	Cyrenians	The Welcome Organisation
The Passage	Simon Community NI	The Whitechapel Centre
	Simon Community Scotland	Simon on the Streets
		Housing Justice

IF YOU ARE ON THIS LIST

We hold these numbers for every charity named here, including the figures not published in this report: your own launch dates, lifespans, formats, creative mix and delivery, set against your peers.

Ask for yours and we will send it over.

Compiled by Nesh Soni - previously head of digital marketing at WPNC (VSO, SSAFA, BHF). · nesh@ampvis.com

Who You're Reaching, And Who You're Showing

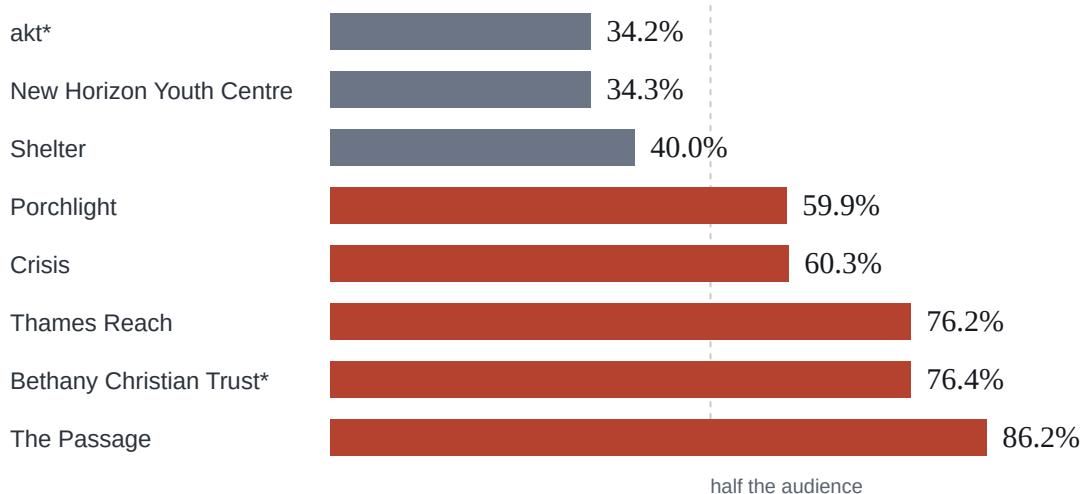
Across the eight charities where Meta publishes audience delivery data, **five sent most of their reach to people over 55**, and three of those sent more than three quarters of it. Across all 33 charities, only 14% of the creatives with a face in them show anyone that age.



Single Homeless Project

One of the 14% of creatives with a face that show someone over 55.

SHARE OF REACH DELIVERED TO PEOPLE OVER 55



279 creatives, reach-weighted. *akt and Bethany Christian Trust rest on one and two creatives.

Meanwhile, of the 273 tagged creatives with a face in them, **38, 14%** show **someone over 55**.

So What Is Choosing The Audience?

The Ad Library shows gender and age bounds, not interests, lookalikes or custom audiences. So potentially, a mixture of targeting suggestions such as interests, the creative and Meta's algorithm is the reason why different charities are seeing different audiences.

Creative is one of the major levers here, and the only one that can be completely controlled by the advertiser.

Everyone Set The Same Basic Targeting

- Over 95% left gender open and the age cap completely open, including 65+.
- This is mostly by design: Advantage+ campaigns prescribe these settings.

Everyone Got A Different Audience

- Delivery to over-55s ranged from **34%** at New Horizon Youth Centre to **86%** at The Passage.
- Delivery to women ranged from **39% to 72%**, depending on the charity.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR PLAN

Check who Meta actually delivered to last Christmas, to help you tweak this year's creative. That is the lever you still hold.

What The Sector's Christmas Actually Looks Like

We tagged 442 creatives on approximately 40 attributes: what is in the picture, what the copy does, how the ask is built. Across the 33 charities, some answers are more alike than you would expect.

72.7%

have no call to action on the image

The button does all the asking.

52.3%

never name an amount

No suggested figure or ladder for donation, no "£25 buys..."

47.9%

show no visible logo

Half the sector's Christmas creative is unbranded on the image itself.

86.8%

carry no hard social proof in the copy

No testimonial, rating, supporter count, award or press mention.

And The Things Everyone Has Dropped

No hashtags

96.4%

No @ mentions

99.8%

How The Appeals Are Pitched

48%

of creatives name the hardship and then resolve it with hope, in their copy.

17%

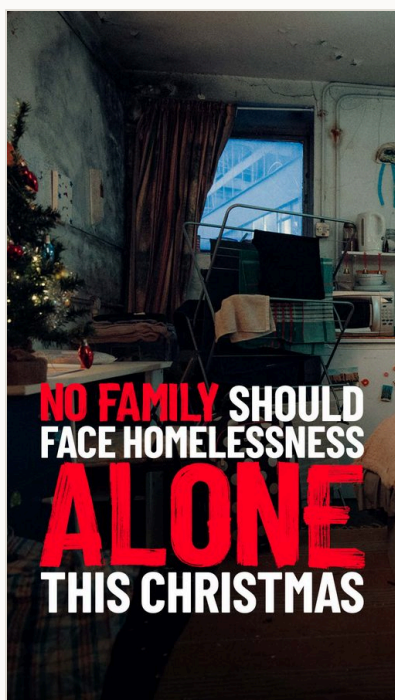
lean on deprivation, unresolved.

Deprivation Or Warmth?

The argument most fundraising teams have every autumn, usually settled on instinct. Across this cohort, all four emotional registers ran within four days of each other.

MEDIAN DAYS LIVE, BY EMOTIONAL REGISTER

Deprivation 71 creatives · 13 charities	22d
Neutral 31 creatives · 7 charities	21d
Warmth 116 creatives · 16 charities	18.5d
Mixed 200 creatives · 21 charities	18d



Shelter

Hardship and a Christmas tree in one frame.

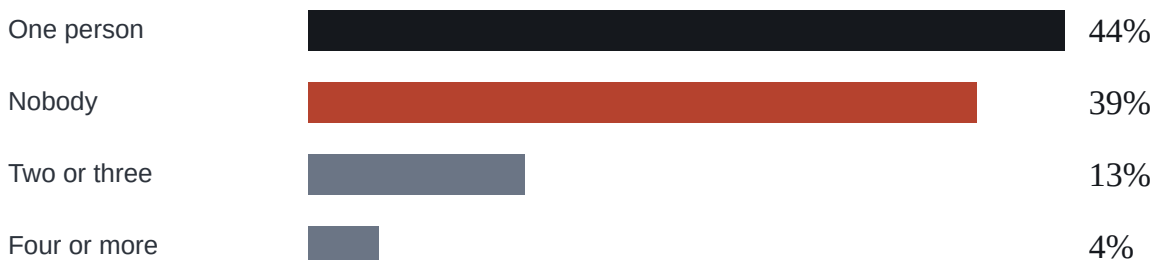
Four days separate the longest-running emotional register from the shortest, on a median of around a fortnight. Deprivation framing, the one most teams argue hardest about, had the longest median of the four. It did not get switched off early.

Nothing in how these 33 charities ran their season suggests one emotional register was being rewarded over another. Lifespan is not income, so this does not settle the argument. It does mean you can have it on the grounds that actually matter to you: dignity, brand, and what your supporters expect.

One Face, Looking Straight At You. Or Nobody At All.

The single portrait is the sector's default unit. Four in ten creatives show no person at all.

HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE IN THE PICTURE



442 tagged creatives. Face counts read by an image model, so treat them as close rather than exact.

In The Picture

- **69%** of creatives with a face have that person looking directly at the camera.
- **44%** show exactly one person. Overleaf, one of each.

In The Copy

- **61%** speak to the reader as "you". Only **23%** use "I" or "we".
- **65%** run long copy, with a median of 453 characters.
- **65%** put a number or a statistic in the text.

WORTH TESTING THIS YEAR

Try depicting someone closer to the age Meta is actually delivering to. Most charities select from an existing image library rather than shooting new, so this is a curation choice as much as a creative one. And try a version with nobody in the image at all.

The Two Defaults, Side By Side

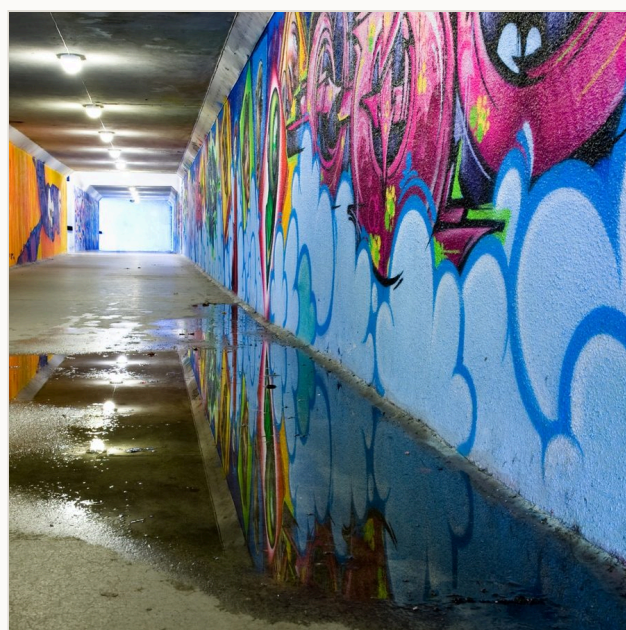
Eight in ten Christmas creatives are one of these two things: a single person looking at you, or no person at all. Both from last Christmas, both from this cohort.



44% show one person

Depaul UK

Of the creatives with a face in them, 69% have that person looking directly down the lens, as here.



39% show no person at all

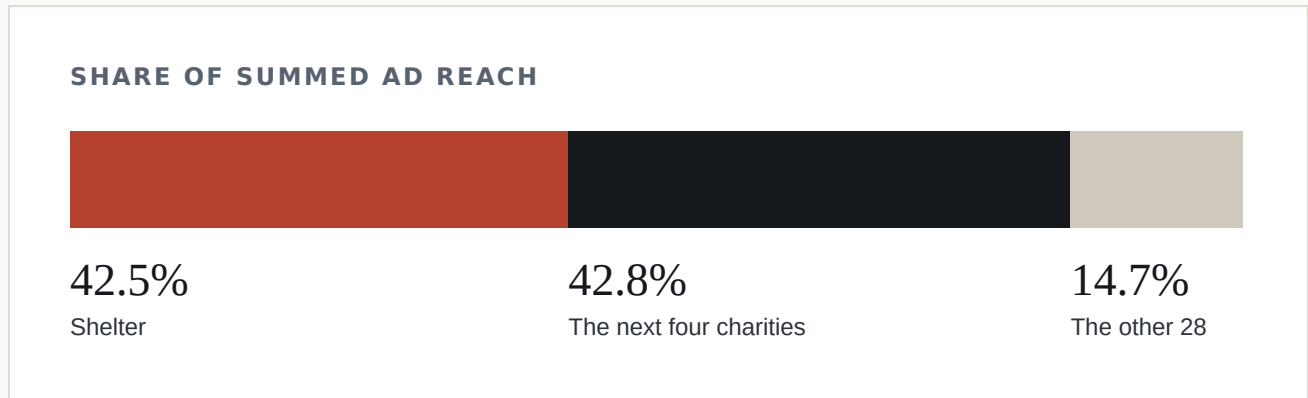
St Martin-in-the-Fields

A place rather than a person. Nearly four in ten Christmas creatives take this route.

Only 17% of the sector's Christmas creative shows two or more people together. Whatever else Christmas appeals are about, they are rarely about a group.

Where The Reach Actually Goes

Five charities account for 85% of all the ad reach in this cohort. Shelter alone accounts for 42.5%.



The Gap Is The Number Of Ads, Not The Spend Behind Each One

Split the large gap in ad reach between larger and smaller charities into its parts, and almost all of it is the number of ads.

LARGER CHARITIES, AGAINST SMALLER CHARITIES

3.3×

the number of
creatives

1.5×

the daily reach per ad

1.0×

the lifespan per ad

15 Days, Whatever The Budget

The typical creative ran 15 days, and that holds for the largest charity in the cohort and the smallest, across a very large gap in reach.

MEDIAN CREATIVE LIFESPAN

Larger charities 15d

Smaller charities 15d

CAME DOWN INSIDE A WEEK

Larger charities 29%

Smaller charities 23%

Around a quarter of all Christmas creatives come down inside their first week. The rest cluster near a fortnight, whatever the size of the charity running them.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR PLAN

Larger charities are not outspending you per ad by nearly as much as the headline reach figures suggest. The gap is how many ads they have in the market, and from section one we know that different creative reaches different people. More ads means more different buckets of audience.

So if you have more ad spend this year, put it towards creating and launching new ads, rather than towards extending the life of the ads already running. One caveat: every ad still needs enough behind it to deliver, so if you split a small budget too thin, none of them get going.

The Season Runs On Two Clocks

Larger charities are live 12 days earlier and peak in late November. Smaller charities arrive in the third week of November. Both stop almost completely once the new year starts.

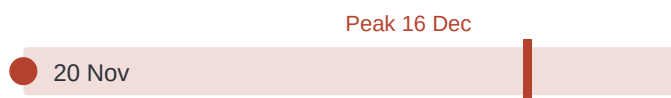
St Mungo's was live on 1 November, Crisis and Shelter from 3 November, Centrepont from 4 November. At the other end, New Horizon Youth Centre's first Christmas ad went live on 1 December.

WHEN THE FIRST AD GOES LIVE, AND WHEN ACTIVITY PEAKS

Larger charities



Smaller charities



1 Nov 15 Nov 1 Dec 15 Dec 31 Dec

Median date of each charity's own first ad.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR PLAN

If you are a smaller charity launching around 20 November, you are arriving into a market the larger charities have been warming up for 12 days, and you are bidding against them at their peak.

It might be worth testing going earlier or later, depending on your strategy and your ad spend budget.

What Stayed Live The Longest

We can see how long each creative ran, not how much it converted. Charities tend to keep paying for ads that are converting, so lifespan is a rough signal for performance. Read everything below as a good starting point worth testing, not a definitive verdict.

+16.6%

A tangible ask, next to a Donate Now button

"£25 buys a Christmas dinner" on its own did nothing measurable. Paired with a Donate Now button it outlasted the image average by 16.6%. The combination is the finding, not the ask.

+6.6%

Long copy over medium copy

Long captions, a median of 453 characters, outlasted the average.

-13.7%

Statistics-led video

Videos whose copy and opening frame lead on numbers came down sooner than other video.

AND WHAT DID NOT SHOW UP

Explicit Christmas framing (ads that mention Christmas, or something Christmas-related) on its own made no measurable difference to how long an ad ran.

Five Things Worth Testing On Your Christmas Ads

These come from signals in how long ads stayed live and how reach was spread across the cohort. They are starting points for a test, not conclusions.

1 Name an amount

52% of the sector never does. Where a tangible amount appeared next to a Donate Now button, those ads stayed live 17% longer than the average.



The Passage

2 Select an image closer to who Meta is actually reaching

Only 14% of creatives with a face in them show anyone over 55. In five of the eight charities with delivery data, most of the reach went to that group.

3 Try an ad with nobody in the image

39% of the sector's creatives already show no person at all, so there is plenty of precedent for an abstract or object-led execution.

4 Put the ask on the image

73% rely on the button alone to carry the call to action.

5 Spend extra budget on more ads, not on the ads already running

That is what the larger charities in this cohort did: 3.3× the creatives, at identical lifespans.

HOW TO USE THIS LIST

Every one of these is a change to the creative, so you can test it without touching your budget or your targeting. If you would like help structuring how to run these tests, have a chat with us.

How This Was Built

The Data

Every UK ad published on Meta by 33 homelessness charities, launched between 1 November and 31 December 2025, taken from the Meta Ad Library. Charities were selected by sector and by whether they ran enough ads in the window to say anything about.

Two Numbers, Two Jobs

Media figures use all **890** creatives launched in the window. Creative figures use **442** tagged creatives, capped at 40 per charity so no single advertiser dominates, and including ads launched in the 31 days before 1 November.

How We Separated Signal From Noise

- A pattern was only tested where at least three creatives carried the attribute and at least three did not. Below that, we report the count and nothing else.
- Every pattern was tested against 1,000 reshuffles of the same data, blocked within each charity, so a charity's own house style cannot create a sector pattern on its own.
- With that many attributes, some will clear any bar by chance. We corrected for that across the whole set of tests, and only patterns that survived the correction are called findings.
- Anything where a single charity supplied more than half the creatives is reported as that charity's practice, not the sector's. Eight attributes were set aside on exactly that basis.
- Attributes that nearly every ad shared were removed before pattern-finding, because they cannot separate one ad from another.

What We Are Not Claiming

Lifespan is not performance

The Ad Library shows what ran and for how long. It does not show donations, click-through or cost per gift. Charities tend to keep paying for ads that work, which is why lifespan is worth looking at, but it is a rough proxy and not a definitive verdict on performance.

Delivery and spend come from a case study of eight charities

Meta publishes audience breakdowns only for ads it classified as social issue ads. Those eight skew towards the larger charities, and two of them rest on fewer than five creatives.

The ad examples are illustrations

They were chosen by eye to show what a pattern looks like, not because they are typical, and nothing is implied about how any of them performed.

This is one season

Read it as a data point from last year, rather than an evergreen set of best practices.

Every figure in this report traces back to a saved output. Ask and we will send you the working for any of them.

Who Made This



Nesh Soni
AmpVis

Nesh Soni runs Meta paid social for charities and growing brands, handling strategy, media buying and creative direction as one job rather than three. Before AmpVis, he was Head of Digital Marketing at WPNC, the UK charity agency, leading paid social for VSO International, SSAFA, Breakthrough T1D UK, Blesma and Bank Workers Charity, and halving cost per acquisition on VSO's acquisition programme. Earlier he grew Talk London at the Greater London Authority by 150% on conversion rate.

AmpVis is where that work gets its evidence: competitor and peer advertising analysed at creative and media level, so a testing plan starts from what a market is actually doing rather than from a blank page. This report is the first of those analyses to be published.

IF THIS WAS USEFUL

Your own figures are on the table, set against the 32 charities you were running alongside. The offer is on page 3 and it does not expire with the season.

nesh@ampvis.com · ampvis.com