



Radio 2021 Christmas

the world's number one festive charity radio station



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The History of Radio Christmas

How an idea of using a RSL to broadcast festive music around the globe turned into an instant success and led to a worldwide audience.

From humble beginnings in a garden shed (see photo below) in Amersham, Buckinghamshire, Radio Christmas became a popular station with the local community and soon grew to reach hundreds of thousands of listeners around the globe.

In 2008 Street Kids Direct decided to raise funds for their work with vulnerable children at risk and on the streets in Latin America by starting their own radio station.

A small team of radio enthusiasts together with just 5 radio presenters began to plan 24 days of radio programming.

The technical capacity of the team was rather limited and so a

local ex-BBC engineer stepped in to help get the station off the ground.

Almost all the equipment was borrowed from local schools and other establishments, and the FM transmitter was rented from a company that specialised in RSLs.

Listening to the radio on the internet was still a very new concept, but with a little determination the station developed a radio app for both major platforms and figured out how to stream online and connect the studio to the transmitter, which were situated a mile apart.

Thanks to all those early pioneers, Radio Christmas got on air on the 1st December 2008.



Duncan Dyason
Founder & Station Manager

Duncan lives and works in Guatemala City, Central America, where he has worked with street children since 1992. His passion for the children was the seed for the radio station.



Engaging the local community

The success of Radio Christmas was the involvement of local people in the station's design, construction, management, promotion and production.

From the very first days of Radio Christmas the local community were actively involved.

As the rumour of the station's first broadcast hit the local press and presentations were made to local business groups, schools, churches and other interest groups, the number of people getting involved increased dramatically.

The concept of a festive charity radio station broadcasting on local FM as well as online was so embraced by local people to the point that many years after the first broadcasts in 2008 the station has been spoken of affectionately as "our" station.

Just one week before Radio Christmas took to the airwaves the station was still struggling to find a way of connecting the actual studio to the transmitter site. The local grammar school was the best place to situate the transmitter, due to its location and height of one of the school buildings.

The school was unable to offer to host the studio and so a way of connecting the two was devised over the internet, using new technologies that had just come from the testing stages before full development.



“

Radio Christmas has been a special part of my life since I heard about it from a friend who thought I could help make a difference.



”

Martin Hughes
Head of Programming

Within hours of the first transmission, beginning with the Breakfast Show hosted by a local school teacher Phil Parkinson, the phone line began to ring and people started to volunteer to help present shows, prepare and read the news, answer the phone and emails and become technical producers.

On day one of Radio Christmas in 2008 only 15% of the month's programming was filled. By the end of day 5 every show had been allocated to local people wanting to showcase their charity, their school or just play their favourite music and discuss local issues.

Kicking off a career in radio

On average Radio Christmas involves around 800 volunteers every year to help run the station.

Some volunteers have gone on to become radio presenters on other local radio stations, or have launched their own online radio productions.

Children and young people have decided to use the station to launch their own music or band.

When a group of teenage boys

asked to have their own show little did we think it would lead to them becoming a recognised band that went on to sign with RCA Records and Sony Music. Their band is called Amber Run and are an indie rock band now based in Nottingham.

Some volunteers have turned their love of radio into a career and have now worked with the BBC and ITV in both TV and Radio.

The funniest moments that only radio can offer

Being a station run by volunteers, many of whom are children and young people, means that anything can happen.

When the station was able to connect the phone to the broadcast desk, a new and exciting possibility arose for phone-ins, requests and the like.

The very first phone call came live on an evening show hosted by three teenage girls who received a call from a young girl in the local area.

The presenters were so excited to receive the call they decided to allow the caller to go live without asking why

she had called or if she wanted a music request.

At the moment of going live the young girl stated her name and then said "mum, if you're listening, I'm in the loo and there's no paper!"

The teenage presenters could not contain themselves with laughter and quickly the phone was busy with callers saying how they loved the station and could the little girl call in on a regular basis.

Many other memorable moments will be forever etched in the memories of hundreds of listeners forever.



Impacting kids lives

The reason the station came into being was to raise money for street-living and high-risk children in Latin America.

Street Kids Direct is a charity that was born in Amersham with a passion to reach vulnerable children in Guatemala after the founder, Duncan Dyason - a local youth worker - moved there in 1992.

The money raised over the years has helped fund various projects in Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. The charity is run entirely by

volunteers, some of whom have now joined Duncan in Central America to help change the lives of hundreds of vulnerable children.

Since the station started in 2008 the charity has helped fund two children's homes, funded various outreach programmes to children on the streets, created a specialist mentoring programme for high-risk children and kept many hundreds of children in school and off the streets.

The work in Central America continues to grow and help more children.



Taking the station around the world

Thanks to the interest in the station and the access to new technologies, Radio Christmas has been able to launch studios in Guatemala and Honduras.

Children, youths and adults from both countries have linked with the studio in Amersham to produce a variety of radio programmes 24 hours a day.

What has been exciting is the interest from the children and young people who have benefitted from the funds raised to get involved in the station.

Every Christmas children, volunteers and charity staff now run programmes that discuss the complex lives they live and how the charity has impacted them.

Radio Christmas would now like to launch a Spanish-speaking festive radio station from Guatemala.

Interesting Facts about Radio Christmas

- * On average listeners from 120 countries tune into Radio Christmas on a daily basis.
- * 43,500 people listened to Radio Christmas on 25th December.
- * The vast majority of listeners to Radio Christmas are from the United Kingdom followed by the USA, Canada and Germany.
- * The most popular time to listen to Radio Christmas is from 1pm - 6pm weekdays.
- * Over £250,000 has been raised by the station since 2008.
- * Approximately 600-800 volunteers from the local community volunteer with Radio Christmas every other year.



your local festive charity radio station

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