



# SILVER SANTA

A project conducted in association with  
Attend UK

The *Silver Santa* Project is a local lottery funded project aimed at elderly people in care homes. The idea is to pack and wrap a shoebox with suitable items that can be delivered to them for opening on Christmas morning.

The first *Silver Santa* project was successfully piloted in York, UK in 2018.

80 residents at *Amarna house*, York, received a shoebox packed with gifts that were purchased and packed by individual in the local community. The project involved local schools, churches, community groups and individuals.

This guide outlines how to go about setting a *Silver Santa* project up, and gives top tips on things to do (and some things to avoid).

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## Contact details:

Ensuring your communications are separate from any other work or private emails means that you need to create a new email account. By including the 'Silver Santa' name and place e.g. silversantaYork@gmail.com, all stakeholders will recognise you, and by taking this first step before you begin any communications will avoid any confusion.



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### Top tips:

- ✓ Create a new GMAIL account, use the format: silversanta[placename]@gmail.com
  - ✓ Set up the GMAIL account to forward all Silver Santa emails to your personal email account, but make sure you only reply from the Silver Santa GMAIL address
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## Set your time scale: Collection, storage and delivery to care home/residents.

The first things that people ask when presented with the opportunity to become involved is 'when do you want this?' and 'where do I take it?' Consequently, before you begin promotion, you need to have a realistic timescale of events. Consider dates for the following aspects:

- a. **Collection of boxes** by volunteers/organising designated drop off points.



Schools and large organisations will probably prefer you to pick up the boxes; this makes it much easier for their organisation to become involved. For schools, the preferred date from them will usually be in the last week of the school term. The York project also offered to collect boxes from individuals within organisations as well as box givers that were not associated with any group. Several employees from the university became box givers and we collected them in person, however, it would have been much easier and less time consuming to have promoted a designated drop off point that was on campus as it is a huge maze of offices and accommodation. Consider what resources you have

and how best to use them. Individual pickups often wanted to discuss the project, ask questions and have a chat, which means they require a lot of time and a friendly face. Some givers would not have been able to get to a designated drop off point. On the other hand, for church members meeting in one building, a large sign at the back of the church instructed them where to leave their box.

**Don't** underestimate the time that collection takes; the York project projected invested three days in the collection of boxes from individuals and organisations.

**Don't** underestimate the space that the boxes take up in a domestic car. While one might think a shoe box is only small, there were many sizes of shoe boxes and other boxes that givers had used in place of a shoe box, e.g. one school used empty paper boxes which were beautifully wrapped and decorated, but rather larger than expected!

The York project initially communicated/responded to enquiries with

*'We are arranging pick-up and drop-off points around York between (and including) Friday 14th and Monday 17th December.'*

In reality, we were actively collecting boxes from 14-19<sup>th</sup> December, as well as collecting from family, friends and other individuals the week prior to this. Once givers had created their boxes, even if it was prior to the collection date, they were keen to have them collected and out of the way.

#### b. Storage and delivery to care home

You will need to communicate with the care home manager regarding storage and delivery of the boxes. This may require some assertive negotiation; with the York project, the care home felt unable to store the boxes, but it was unrealistic for us (with our resources) to deliver them actually on Christmas day.

We identified an area under the staff stairwell, and it was agreed we could deliver them there a day or two before Christmas. This meant we needed a temporary storehouse for them.

Thankfully, the church that works with the care home agreed to provide an area for the project. As said previously, they do take up a large space!



### c. Distribution to residents



The distribution of the boxes can be approached in many ways. Boxes can be left at the home for staff to hand out, or placed in residents rooms by Silver Santa volunteers or by staff at an agreed time, or boxes can be delivered personally by volunteers or staff on Christmas day, or on another designated day that has been agreed between the care home manager and the leader of the Silver Santa project.

The York project decided to distribute the boxes personally to each resident on Christmas day morning. A time was arranged with the care manager to begin handing out the boxes. The York project deliberately took an intimate approach to this; each resident was handed the box while the volunteer spent time with the resident as they talked about the contents of the box. We began distributing boxes at 10.30 and by 12.30 had not managed to hand out half the boxes (using a large trolley to help transport them through the corridors). At 12.30, residents were being seated for lunch, so we returned later at 2pm. While spending another three hours there, we were able to hand out a lot more boxes, but by the late afternoon some residents were sleeping as it had been a tiring day for them – others had gone out with family. Fortunately, we had **a tick list** of those who had received a box from us, and the rest of the boxes were left and distributed by the staff on boxing day. Both modes of delivery were equally effective for the residents, but the volunteers who handed out the boxes were able to share the joy and experience the gratitude of the residents.

How you distribute your boxes will depend on the volunteer team you can recruit and their availability and what they want to enjoy from the project. Before you launch your project, it is helpful to have some ideas as to how you wish to proceed with the actual climax of the giving and receiving experience for both volunteers and residents.



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#### Top tips:

- ✓ Create a realistic timeline for collection, delivery and distribution of boxes
  - ✓ Organise enough storage space in a suitable, central location
  - ✓ Liaise with the home manager about a time for distribution over the Christmas period (which will depend on your team of volunteers, or availability of the staff)
  - ✓ Obtain a rough guide of male:female ratio as volunteers may ask which gender you require more boxes for.
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d. Promotion: Newspapers, radio stations, community groups, individuals.

NEWS  
21st December 2018  
**Joseph Rowntree School pupils bring elderly residents**



By Haydn Lewis | [Twitter](#) Haydnpress  
Live News Editor



[Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [LinkedIn](#) [Email](#) [Comment](#) 0 comment

STUDENTS and staff at a York secondary school contributed a large number of Christmas gifts for residents at Amarna House in York through the 'Silver Santa' project.

Once you have your own discrete email address, you can begin emailing any potentially interested parties. Your contact details and any materials that will clarify what the project is about are helpful. Firstly, the local radio station and local newspapers are always looking for human interest stories. By looking on the paper's/radio's web site you can identify the correct address.

Usually, the most effective approach is to find the address of the 'Newsdesk' and send them a brief description of the project. We also attached a copy of the leaflets informing givers of appropriate items to include, images of the boxes (inside and out) and quotes from the givers. **Always remember** to adhere to GDPR constraints and ask permission to share any images of givers or community groups.

### e. Newspapers

This was the email sent to the news desks of the local newspapers by the York project:

Dear YP Editor,

*The Silver Santa Project is a local lottery funded project aimed at elderly people in care homes. The idea is to pack and wrap a shoebox with suitable items that can be delivered to them for opening on Christmas morning. Despite residing in a care home, many residents do not have surviving relatives or a visitor to give a gift to them. We are working with Attend UK to pilot this project in Amarna House, York, before we roll it out nationally.*

*If you would like to get involved in this project, we would be delighted to deliver shoeboxes from your community group. In addition to this, if any members would like to 'go the extra mile' and give their gift in person, we are looking forward to welcoming givers into the home at around 10.30 on Christmas morning. This would enable people to enjoy giving the box they have packed to a resident and having the joy of seeing the wonderful impact a simple and thoughtful gift can have.*

*Please get in touch for further details and take a moment to look at the attached A4 sheet to determine if this is something you would be interested in getting involved with.*

*Kind regards,*

## f. Radio promotion

You will likely have a range of radio stations in your area and will be able to contact them in various ways, depending on your preference. An online search of 'contacting BBC Radio York' came up with:



### Contact details

1. twitter. @bbcyork.
2. email. jonathan@bbc.co.uk.
3. sms. 81333, start your message with 'YORK'
4. phone. 0800 111 4849.

### BBC Radio York - Jonathan Cowap - Contact us

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p001d7g3/contact>

You should be able to get a similar response for your area.

If you feel comfortable enough to do so, you could offer to go in and talk about Silver Santa on air. The York project had a positive response to this, and it created a lot of interest.

If you are a confident Twitter user, sending a direct message to media organisations can also be effective. A direct message to a reporter obtained from the Twitter site of York TV also prompted interest. However, constraints of time may mean that you prioritise one form of media over another. We did not have time to follow up all the expressions of interest we provoked, so we chose to use those that we believed had the widest audience.

## g. Articles in staff/church/community group newsletters



If your locality includes an organisation (e.g. a hospital, a university) with a large group of employees, it can be beneficial to ask them to include details of the project in their staff/community newsletter. Personal contact is often more effective here, either visiting the organisation or making contact with an employee you already know can open doors into the organisation. Think about the people you already know and how they may be connected to other groups.

We had a great response from the University of York who included this in their monthly newsletter:

*Want to make a difference to an elderly person's life in York this Christmas time?*

*Silver Santa is a local lottery funded project aimed at elderly people at care homes. Staff are invited to pack and wrap a shoebox that will be delivered to them on Christmas morning. Despite residing in a care home, many residents do not have surviving relatives or a visitor to give a gift to them. The Silver Santa team are working with Attend UK to pilot this project in Amarna House, York, before they roll it out nationally.*

*In addition to this, if any staff members would like to 'go the extra mile' and give their gift in person, we are looking forward to welcoming givers into Amarna House care home at around 10.30 on Christmas morning. This would enable people to enjoy giving the box they have packed to a resident and having the joy of seeing the wonderful impact a simple and thoughtful gift can have.*

*For further details contact Pauline at [silversantayork@gmail.com](mailto:silversantayork@gmail.com)*

When queries/responses were sent to us, the York project responded by personalising this standard email which (in most cases) then became a dialogue:

*Hello and thank you so much for expressing your interest in the Silver Santa Project!  
The idea behind Silver Santa is to show an elderly person in a care home that they are not forgotten.*

*Over 30% of people in a care home don't receive a visitor, so they can feel alone, especially at Christmas time.*

*You can be involved by wrapping a shoebox in Christmas paper and filling it with suitable gifts – please see the attached leaflet for some suggestions (feel free to add your own) about what you could pack, and how to pack it. An important aspect of the gift is to include a personalised message – it could be anything from a short seasonal greeting to an explanation of who you are and why you wanted to send a gift; some people have even written out a poem or a few quotes from their favourite piece of literature! You may even want to make that extra connection by putting a photograph of yourself with the message to accompany the gifts inside the box. Of course, what you put in the shoebox and how you express a caring thought is up to you, because we know that in receiving a Christmas Silver Santa Shoebox, an elderly person will know they are remembered and cared for. In doing this, you can really be a part of making a significant difference to someone's Christmas!*

*If you wish to create a Christmas Silver Santa Shoebox, please let us know. We are arranging pick-up and drop-off points around York between (and including) Friday 14th and Monday 17th December.*

*Please don't hesitate to contact us with any questions you may have about any of this.*

*Happy Christmas shopping!*

*The Silver Santa team*



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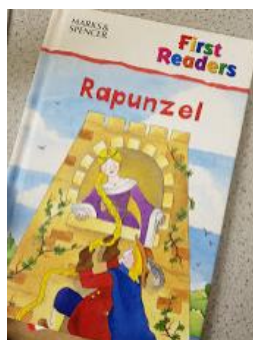
## Top tips:

- ✓ Contact organisations by email and follow up by phone.
  - ✓ Adjust the details and use the example emails to save time.
  - ✓ Prepare a 'script' with the important details so that you are ready to explain the project and can respond to any questions you may be asked.
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## h. Box contents



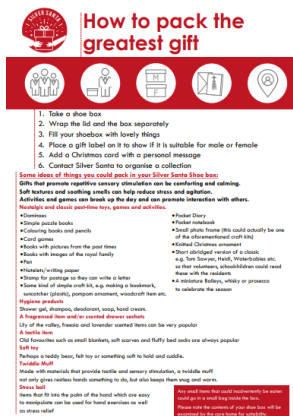
Prior to distributing a list of suitable contents to interested volunteers, it is important to meet with the care manager and agree what gifts the manager will accept in the care home. The York project committed to checking the boxes before distribution which was incredibly time consuming. On the other hand, we did identify several objects that were not suitable for giving to residents. We were also able to alter the gender of some boxes by removing/replacing items so that we had the correct ratio of male:female boxes.



Checking and sorting boxes for suitability was the **most time-consuming** aspect of the project. We soon identified which groups had taken care over selecting gifts and which groups had been somewhat neglectful in considering suitable items (this was evident in boxes that were collected from one particular school as it became clear the contents had not been checked out by an adult). It hadn't occurred to me that people would consider packing second-hand items, but this was something we came across in several boxes.

Showing examples of boxes that were gladly received by residents in communication and giving clear instructions about contents would, to some degree, avoid this issue.

i. Use the literature available



The York project created a poster with information regarding what to pack in the shoe box. We also asked people to indicate if the shoe box was suitable for 'male'/'female' by placing a small 'f' or 'm' in the top corner of the lid.

We encouraged volunteers to include a letter or personal communication inside the box and this brought great joy to the residents.

j. Labelling boxes for distribution at the care home

Initially, we considered adding a card to each box to state the intent of the Silver Santa project. However, as boxes already contained a personal note or



Christmas card from the giver of the box, we taped a label to the outside, on the box lid. This proved very effective as residents kept their contents in the box for a long time, and even once the contents were used up, many of them kept the box. We included the Silver Santa Gmail address on the label, and this was used by several relatives to express their gratitude.



Happy Christmas from the Silver Santa team.  
All the Silver Santa gifts have been carefully packed by members in the community who wanted you to know that we are thinking about you this Christmas.

Silver Santa - York

[silversantayork@gmail.com](mailto:silversantayork@gmail.com)

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### Top tips:

- ✓ Give clear, written, guidance regarding the contents of boxes.
  - ✓ Organise checking of the boxes – this would be more effective if care home staff could be involved.
  - ✓ Make sure gender is indicated, discretely but clearly to assist effective distribution among residents.
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### Disseminate feedback

We were very encouraged by the feedback we received. Be sure to disseminate this to any other volunteers who assisted with the project and share your success stories with the groups that have contributed to the project so they can share the feel-good aspect that the project delivers, not only to the residents, but to all involved in making the project a reality.

#### **Email from D**

*"Thank you for the gift box delivered to my father on Christmas Day at the Amarna House care home. Your kindness is much appreciated."*

#### **Email from J**

*"Many thanks for your gift, delivered to my wife at Armana this afternoon. A wonderful though & very much appreciated the work & sentiments that go with them."*

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: Labels to place on top of shoeboxes

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Happy Christmas from the Silver Santa team.

All the Silver Santa gifts have been carefully packed by members in the community who wanted you to know that we are thinking about you this Christmas.

 Silver Santa - York

[silversantayork@gmail.com](mailto:silversantayork@gmail.com)

## APPENDIX 2: Written guidance about box contents and packaging



# How to pack the greatest gift



1. Take a shoe box
2. Wrap the lid and the box separately
3. Fill your shoebox with lovely things
4. Place a gift label on it to show if it is suitable for male or female
5. Add a Christmas card with a personal message
6. Contact Silver Santa to organise a collection

[silversantayork@gmail.com](mailto:silversantayork@gmail.com)

### Some ideas of things you could pack in your Silver Santa Shoe box:

**Gifts that promote repetitive sensory stimulation can be comforting and calming.**

**Soft textures and soothing smells can help reduce stress and agitation.**

**Activities and games can break up the day and can promote interaction with others.**

#### **Nostalgic and classic past-time toys, games and activities**

- Dominoes
- Simple puzzle books
- Colouring books and pencils
- Card games
- Books with pictures from the past times
- Books with images of the royal family
- Pen
- Notelets/writing paper
- Stamp for postage so they can write a letter
- Some kind of simple craft kit, e.g. making a bookmark, suncatcher (plastic), pompom ornament, woodcraft item etc.
- Pocket Diary
- Pocket notebook
- Small photo frame (this could actually be one of the aforementioned craft kits)
- Knitted Christmas ornament
- Short abridged version of a classic e.g. Tom Sawyer, Heidi, Waterbabies etc. so that volunteers, schoolchildren could read these with the residents
- A miniature Baileys, whisky or prosecco to celebrate the season

#### **Hygiene products**

Shower gel, shampoo, deodorant, soap, hand cream.

#### **A fragranced item and/or scented drawer sachets**

Lily of the valley, freesia and lavender scented items can be very popular.

#### **A tactile item**

Old favourites such as small blankets, soft scarves and fluffy bed socks are always popular.

#### **Soft toy**

Perhaps a teddy bear, felt toy or something soft to hold and cuddle.

#### **Twiddle Muff**

Made with materials that provide tactile and sensory stimulation, a twiddle muff not only gives restless hands something to do, but also keeps them snug and warm.

#### **Stress ball**

items that fit into the palm of the hand which are easy to manipulate can be used for hand exercises as well as stress relief.

Any small items that could inadvertently be eaten could go in a small bag inside the box.

Please note the contents of your shoe box will be examined by the care home for suitability.