

GET OWT!
Outside **W**ith **T**oddlers

IN TEN



SIMPLE

STEPS



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WELCOME

This simple guide is here to help you explore, plan and run Get OWT! sessions in your community, providing some clear steps and practical pointers as you consider starting Get OWT! in your context.

Get OWT! is a family-oriented programme that encourages families with young children to get outside and encounter nature in a safe and supportive environment. It is based around creative and sensory activities for carers and children to participate in together. The programme shares the good news of God's love and encourages connection, wonder, care for creation and a sense of wellbeing.

A message from Nick and Shelley Ward, creators of Get OWT!:

'We hope that the thoughts we share might offer you some practical pointers as you think about starting Get OWT! in your own context.'



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THE NEED TO GET OWT!

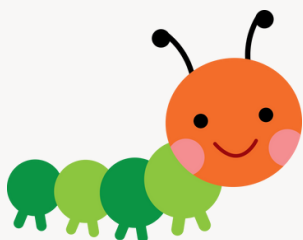


'We have two young children of our own. Often, we just need to get out of the house! Getting outside and interacting in nature's playground is so important.'

Connecting with nature is incredibly beneficial for our physical, mental and spiritual health. It raises vitamin levels, nurtures creativity and inspires problem-solving.

Celebrating and engaging with God's creation also enhances our spiritual wellbeing. Getting out into nature encourages people to stop, to notice the beauty around them, to feel calm and peaceful and to encounter God through his creation. This programme is Christ-centred, aiming to include the good news of Jesus in everything we do.

Get OWT! is a very visible expression of The Salvation Army, but can be run by any church. As a tool for mission, it enables churches to connect with people outside a building, build new connections within the community and show God's love and care to families right where they are.



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WHAT IS GET OWT!?

Get OWT! is a delightful programme that is accessible to all families, helping them connect with nature and spend time outside by participating in a variety of creative and sensory activities together. Each session has a different theme and includes story time, questions, singing and a prayer.

The programme is designed to be adaptable to various settings, always creating a safe and welcoming space for families to connect with nature and each other. Supportive relationships are built as families and children interact with one other around the activities, and as leaders show that each person is known and valued.

Using Bible-based resources as part of the sessions enables people of all ages to connect with, and respond to, our Creator God through stories, songs and prayers. Get OWT! is a great missional opportunity to share the good news and nurture disciples of all ages!



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ONE PARENT'S EXPERIENCE

'Get OWT! is so different from other toddler groups and it is the perfect environment for learning and social development. Everyone is so welcoming and friendly. You can tell that so much thought goes into everything. My little girl is always so excited and inspired by the various activities. It's such a relief to be able to get outside and connect with people and nature. I cannot thank everyone involved with Get OWT! enough for the priceless memories we are making in the woods I used to play in throughout my own childhood.' - Laura



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10 STEPS TO GET OWT!

- | | | | |
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| 1 | Prayer | 6 | Green Light |
| 2 | Team | 7 | Equipment |
| 3 | Location | 8 | Advertising |
| 4 | Families | 9 | Preparation |
| 5 | Safety | 10 | Ready, Set, Go! |



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1
Have a
Think and
Pray



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1. PRAYER

Take some time to find the green spaces in your community and have a walk or a picnic. Notice who is using the space and whether it's busy or quiet.

As you walk or eat, find time to think and pray about whether setting up Get OWT! is the right step for your church. It's important to surround this initiative in prayer, so encourage your whole congregation to support you in this way.

Ask yourself both practical and deeper questions, such as how running Get OWT! will help you express God's Kingdom in your area. How would it fit within the wider mission of your church? How do you see it working? Weekly, monthly, or as an outreach project? What relationships do you hope to build through Get OWT!? What impact do you hope it will have?

This step centres everything on Christ and brings all ages together in prayer.

'Despite living in an urban setting, we have discovered lots of green space surrounding us, with large open meadows, woodland areas and small streams. Whilst walking in these areas, we wondered whether we could run a programme to help other families connect with the great outdoors.'



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PRAYER IDEA

Take some seeds (bird seed or wildflower seeds) out with you as you explore different green spaces. Read or bring to mind the Parable of the Sower, who ...

'...flings seed everywhere, wastes it with holy abandon, who feeds the birds, whistles at the rocks, picks his way through thorns, shouts hallelujah at the good soil and just keeps on sowing.'

Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Seeds of Heaven: Sermons on the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), pp25-26

Scatter the seeds as you pray:

Creator God, we celebrate your incredible world and our place within it.

We thank you for all the ways we can partner with you and bring more of your goodness and love into the world.

Give us direction and guidance, energy and enthusiasm for this new opportunity to express your love for your people and creation.

Amen.



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Have a Chat with the Team



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2. TEAM

Once you feel that Get OWT! might be something your church should explore, share your vision with your church leadership team.

Discuss how this programme aligns with your church's missional objectives and consider practical matters like budgets and resources. Engage your parent-and-toddler team (or other volunteers) to gather their thoughts and see if they would be willing to be involved. This is a great opportunity to pray together and seek God's guidance. Use this guide to help you communicate what Get OWT! is and what's involved.

This step is all about seeking God's heart for your church and community, discerning if this is something he is calling you to.

'We prayed it over with them and considered whether Get OWT! fitted in with our missional objectives.'



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Identify a Suitable Location



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3. LOCATION

Look for a location that meets the following criteria:

- A large open space for the event shelter
- A wooded area for trails and activities
- Easy accessibility for prams and equipment
- Close to available car parking
- Close to toilet facilities or a café (not essential but a bonus!)

Make sure to check with relevant authorities to obtain permission to use the land. Some green spaces have a 'Friends of ...' group which take responsibility for looking after the space, so be sure to contact them too. Sharing your Risk Assessment and a sample session outline can be helpful.

This step considers different needs and accessibility, respecting others and developing partnerships.



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Engage with Families



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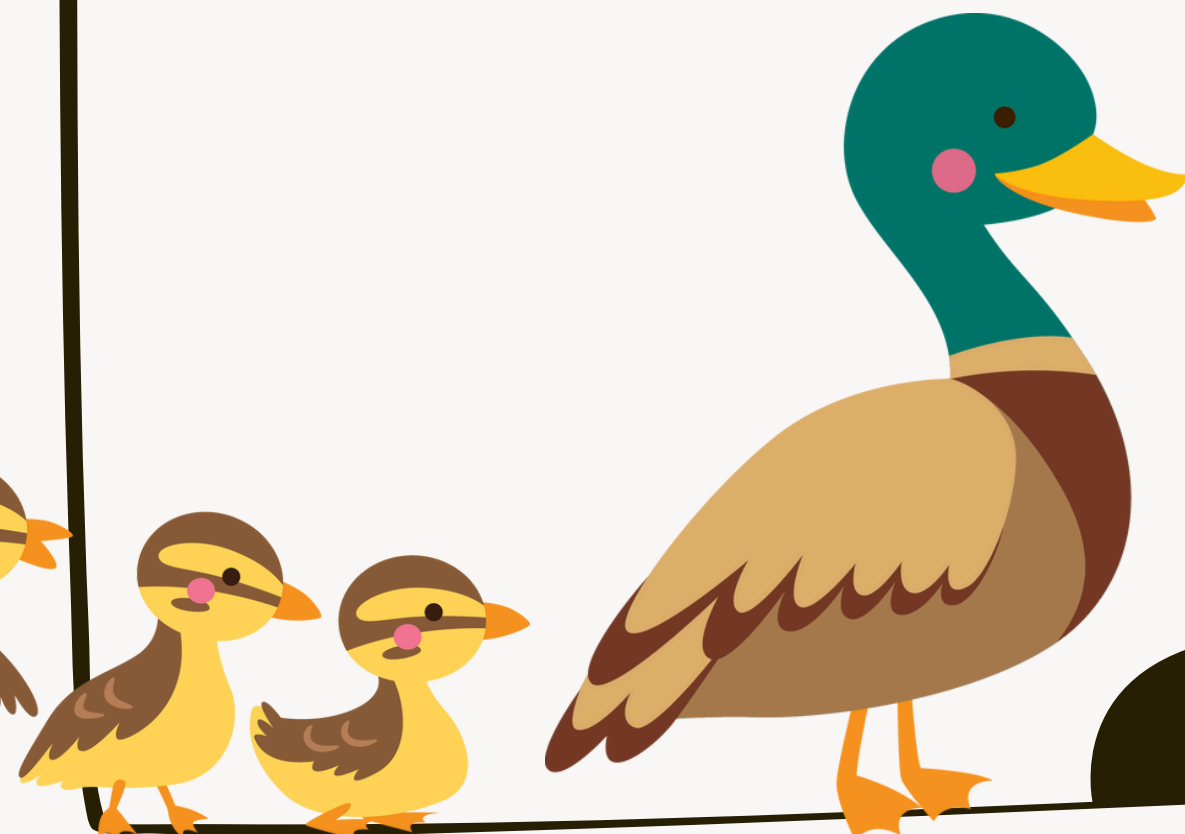
4. FAMILIES

Reach out to the families you work with and ask for their thoughts. Are they aware of any existing outdoor groups for young families? Would they be interested in Get OWT!? What activities would they like to see? When and how often would they like it to run?

Get OWT! is a fantastic opportunity to serve and nurture families and to demonstrate God's love in ways which are important in the earliest years of life. Creating a positive, fun and calm outside space for families to connect and play together can contribute to the development of important social and emotional skills, and help toddlers to explore the world with curiosity and wonder.

Having conversations with families and childcare specialists in your community will help you see how best to approach setting up Get OWT! in your community.

This is a way to involve families in the planning process and ensure the programme meets their needs.



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Safety First!



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5. SAFETY

The safety of everyone involved is a top priority.

Ensure you have a comprehensive Risk Assessment that covers all potential risks. Communicate safety measures clearly to parents and guardians. Sharing a Safety Sheet when families first register for Get OWT! ensures they are following the safety guidelines too.

As part of your planning, have a think about first-aiders. Will a first-aider be available while Get OWT! is taking place? Is your first-aid pack appropriately stocked and available?

This step is important as it prioritises the wellbeing of all participants.

'Talking through the Risk Assessment with our team, and highlighting the responsibilities of team members, was something that we found to be really helpful. We then considered how to communicate the safety measures effectively with parents and guardians. The Risk Assessment is quite a long read, so we chose to put a summary of it (Safety Sheet) in the Registration Form and ask families to read it carefully before taking part in activities.'



**Risk Assessment
and Safety
Sheet templates
available!**



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Get the Green Light



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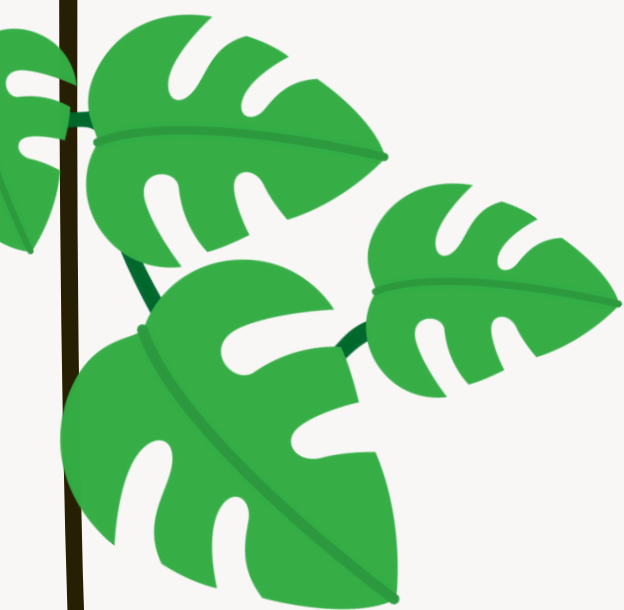
6. GREEN LIGHT

If you have reached this stage and are still keen to pursue Get OWT!, we'd advise you to go back to your church leadership team to update them on developments. Hopefully they will have thought about the potential and value of Get OWT! and will be keen to support it.

If you are part of a Salvation Army corps, it is important to inform your DHQ. You may be eligible for funding grants through monies held at divisions for new mission initiatives. Please contact your DHQ to enquire.

Decide how much you will charge to try to cover your costs whilst still making the programme accessible for all. Between £2 and £3 is affordable for most families and should cover the weekly costs.

This step encourages creativity in finding resources and support.



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7

Source Equipment



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7. EQUIPMENT

Gather the necessary equipment based on your context. This may include:

- A sturdy outdoor event shelter where you can welcome families and set up activities
- A heavy-duty garden trolley for transporting equipment
- A4 display holders and clear pouches to display activity signs and notices
- Gopak tables and chairs for the team

There is a full list of suggested equipment at the end of this guide.

This step is about creating a warm welcome for all who attend Get OWT!, extending God's hospitality to everyone.



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Advertise



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8. ADVERTISING

Engage with the families who shared their thoughts (see Step 4) and inform them of your plans along with the start date.

Then consider using other communication channels such as Facebook. You may want to think about how you should advertise, aware that you might not want too many arriving in your first week!

You may want to make your event shelter visible by getting some banners produced. Consider too whether directional signs need to be placed in the area.

In your advertising, make sure you make it clear where Get OWT! is being held, offering clear directions along with basic information such as where people can park, what type of clothing ought to be worn and details regarding availability of toilets.

Think about how long it will take for you to set up and pack down before you advertise a time.

This step is about making things as clear and welcoming as possible.

'We find it takes us an hour to set up and 45 minutes to pack down and tidy up the area after use.'

**Publicity
templates
available!**



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Plan, Print and Prepare



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9. PREPARATION

Prepare the activities and all the necessary documents and materials. Print off any activity sheets and the trail and consider offering a healthy, wrapped snack as part of the session. This is a great time to get creative and think about how to make each session engaging and fun.

To help get you started, we have included several weeks' worth of material on the Get OWT! page. There is also a list of suggested activities at the end of this guide. We recommend starting with five or six activities. You can always add more as numbers grow, or if you think it is manageable.

Set up a registration system that works for you. An online registration and booking system can help the team know numbers and make signing-in simple.

This step encourages celebration of God's creation, to embrace the benefits of nature and understand how we can take care of our world.

'We usually set up five to eight activities and always include a story time, some questions and songs. For us, this is a time to build community and celebrate together, which is a crucial part of Get OWT!. Make sure you've also printed off all the necessary documents, such as the Registration Form and Record of Attendance. Have a think too about what wrapped snacks you want to put in the packs and get these ready.'



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10
**Ready,
Set, Go!**



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10. READY, SET, GO!

Before your first session, gather your team for a practice run. Familiarise everyone with the equipment and process.

This will help build confidence and ensure everything runs smoothly. Address any issues that come up and make any necessary adjustments.

This step creates space for intergenerational teamwork. Have a debrief with the team to iron out any final issues, and then you're ready!

Remember that with any new venture, you will learn things as you go. Get OWT! can change, grow and adapt, but be encouraged and empowered as you begin this new, exciting ministry.

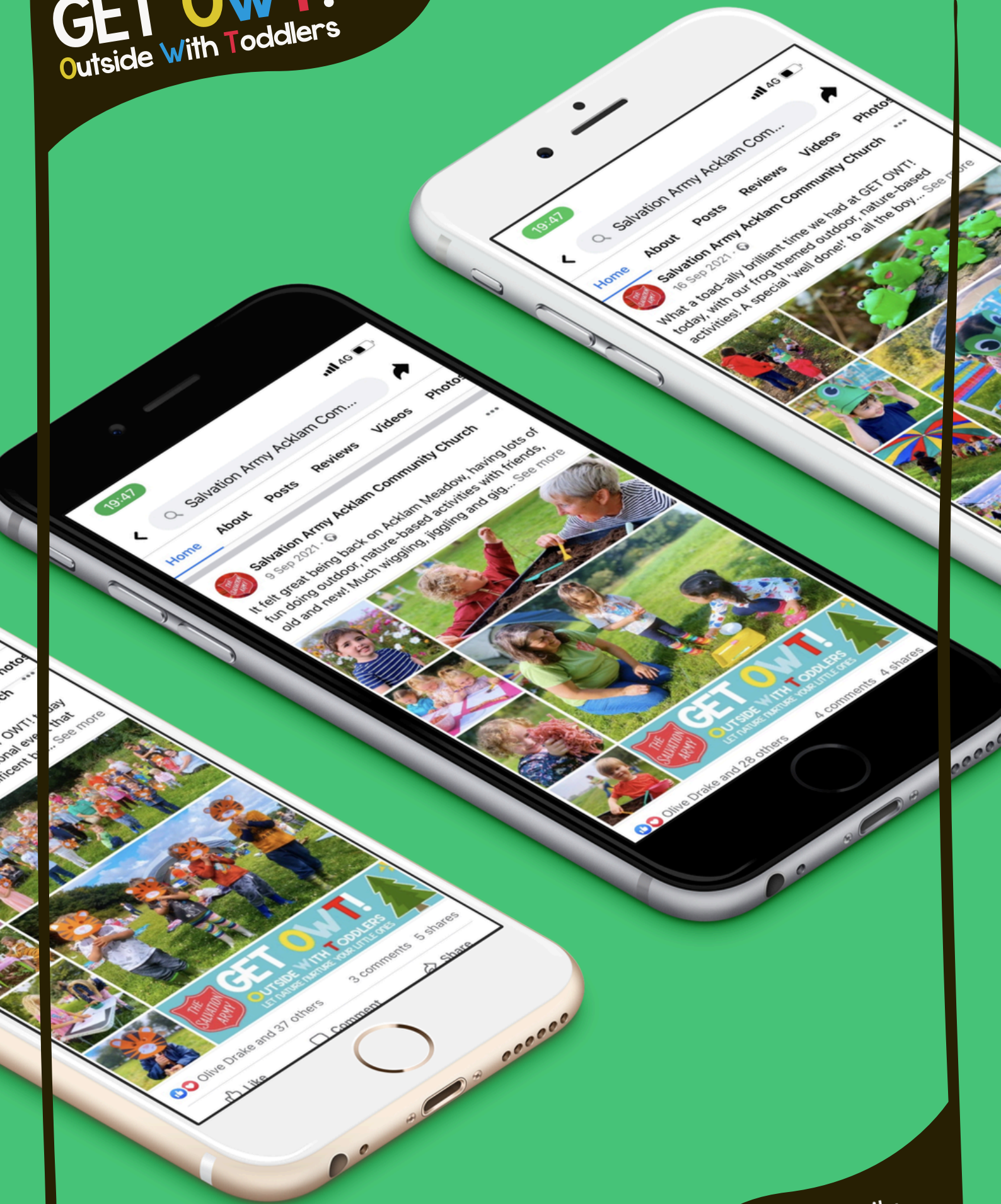
'We saved ourselves a whole lot of embarrassment by practising with the equipment beforehand and found the team had some degree of confidence before our first Get OWT! session.'



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DIFFERENT WAYS TO GET OWT!

There are various ways to organise a Get OWT! session:

- **A whole session:** 90 minutes to two hours, incorporating story time and singing, parachute and bubbles (plus the individual activities).
- **A drop-in activity during the holidays:** Perhaps in a park or space people are using already, or as part of another outdoor community event. A few engaging activities done well can still have a great impact and all the benefits of a bigger session.
- **Alongside or as part of an existing indoor toddler group:** Perhaps monthly or summer sessions outside in a nearby park or field, or use an outside space if you have one at your church.



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ACTIVITY IDEAS



The Salvation Army
Family Ministries
Pinterest page also
features many
activity ideas,
including some
specifically tied in
with Get OWT!

Choose a range of different activities to keep things interesting and engaging. Here are some ideas:

- **Nature crafts:** Sticks, leaves, pine cones, large conkers.
- **Safe sensory play activities:** Rice, mud, sand, bird seed, straw, leaves, water.
- **Playdough or clay:** Can be used with objects from nature.
- **Sticking activities:** Headbands or masks for fun and playfulness. They also make for great photos!
- **Activities for babies:** Sensory bottles and things to explore.
- **Books:** Relating to nature and/or the weekly theme.
- **Painting or colouring:** Nature-safe paints, watercolours, paint sticks.
- **Pretend play:** Water, vehicles, toy figures, animal figures, making pretend food.
- **Something active:** Throwing, moving things, balancing, jumping.
- **Trails:** Nature scavenger hunts, searching for animal pictures pegged to trees and bush branches.

'The best activities are open-ended and focused on the process rather than the outcome. Be realistic with the time you have to prepare and what you're able to transport. Consider using a booking system like Eventbrite to manage attendance and provide enough activity packs, including toddler-friendly snacks. Most parents and carers will bring snacks but it shows thought and care to provide some too as part of the cost of the session, for example individually wrapped Veggie Straws, breadsticks or fruit shapes.'



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EQUIPMENT IDEAS

Larger equipment:

- One or two event shelters to provide some shelter and shade and be visible (make sure they are sturdy and look at fast-pitch options)
- Tables, depending on what you can transport (low toddler Gopak tables are good for art and craft activities, low camping tables are lightweight and compact)
- A table for signing in and welcoming people
- Waterproof and machine washable picnic mats (easy to transport and set up and they encourage grown-ups to connect with other families as they sit together)
- Banners to make yourself visible and communicate what you're doing
- Plastic toddler chairs, plastic foldable chairs for adults, or camping chairs
- A heavy-duty garden trolley (or two) for transporting equipment
- Tuff Trays (easy to stack and transport and ideal for many of the sensory and play activities)
- Soft toy animals (for example IKEA monkeys) to hang up around the event shelter or in trees nearby
- Rubbish and recycling bins or bags
- Speaker and PA system if you want to use backing tracks for singing

Smaller equipment:

- Bungee cords
- Reusable cable ties
- First-aid kit
- Walkie-talkies as phone signal can be poor
- Wipes and paper towels
- Hand sanitiser
- Waterproof display wallets or sign holders for activity signs and information
- String and pegs for hanging artwork
- Storage boxes and zip pouches for transporting and storing activity materials
- Plastic bowls and baskets for materials on tables
- Small trays (The Works has a good selection)
- Larger plastic trays to work on if tables are limited
- Deeper trays such as cat litter trays for sensory play



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