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GET SET!

Finding Your Space and Place



2.1 Understanding Community Needs

Before moving on to any planning, take time to understand your local community. Listening and observing will help you meet real needs rather than duplicating existing provision.

2.1.1 Assessing the need

There are many ways to understand what your community needs. Why not try the following ...

Observe your local area

Sit on the wall outside the corps or in a window at different times of the day; notice who passes by and consider:

- Are there young families in the area?
- Are there parents with prams and pushchairs?
- Do you see people walking past on the school run?

Explore the wider community

If the corps location has limited footfall, try exploring the wider community.

- Walk around the local supermarket or town centre-during the day.
- Visit a local park and engage in conversation with young families.
- Speak to young families you already know and ask what they feel is needed. Listen carefully to their responses.
- Take note of posters, notice boards and community displays as they are often good sources of information.
- Contact and maybe visit local groups and organisations to understand what provision is already available, eg:
 - Local parent and toddler groups
 - Local schools
 - Local authority family hubs/centres
 - Public library



- ☐ Local churches
- ☐ GP surgeries
- ☐ Community centres
- ☐ Leisure centre

Some services, especially those that charge, may see you as potential competition, so approach conversations thoughtfully and respectfully.

Use social media

Local social media is a useful way to see what's happening in your community. If you're unsure how to access this, ask someone in your corps to help gather information this way.

Understanding the bigger picture

Once you have gathered all this information, you will start to see:

- What services already exist.
- If these groups are oversubscribed.
- Where there may be gaps in provision.
- What families in your area truly need.

If you need support in undertaking a *Community Needs Assessment*, contact the territorial community engagement lead (TCEL) for your division.

2.1.2 What is your unique offer?

Use your findings to shape what makes your parent and toddler group special. Reflect on the following questions:

- Who are the other services providing for?
- What is unique about the other groups in your area?
- What times and days of the week are other services available?
- What skills/passions do my volunteers have?
- What experience could be built upon further?
- How many volunteers are available?
- When are my volunteers available?
- What space and facilities do I have?



2.1.3 Plan carefully

Many parents like to attend several sessions a week, as parent and toddler groups provide valuable opportunities for social interaction. Where possible avoid running your group on the same days and times as other providers in the area. **See Section 2.2**



‘I attend Tots three mornings a week as it is often the only adult interaction I get in a day.’

Paige, Darlaston

2.1.4 Final reflection

Before moving forward, the final question to ask is:

- How does what we are able to offer match the needs of our local community?



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2.2 Finding the Best Venue and Time

Choosing the right **location, timing and session structure** will make your group more accessible, sustainable and enjoyable for families and volunteers alike. Careful planning in these areas will help your group run smoothly and meet the needs of families in your community.

Use the information you have gleaned from your work in **Section 2.1** to inform your decision making.

2.2.1 Choosing the right venue

A suitable venue doesn't need to be large, but it does need to be practical and welcoming. Consider the following:

- Is there easy access for pushchairs?
- Are baby-changing facilities available?
- Is there adequate storage for toys and equipment?
- Is there free/accessible parking nearby?

If not, how might you manage these issues?

Exploring other venue options

If your Salvation Army hall is not ideal, consider exploring other local venues:

- Other Salvation Army premises
- Schools
- Community centres
- Soft play venues
- Other churches

Some spaces may be underused but perfectly suited to a parent and toddler group.



2.2.2 Choosing the right time

Timing that works for families is key to ensuring good attendance and a settled group environment. Consider scheduling around:

- School drop-off and pick-up times
- Babies' nap and feeding times

2.2.3 Deciding the length of the session

Most parent and toddler groups run for one-and-a-half to two hours. See **Section 5**. Within this time, aim to include a balanced routine:

- Free play
- Snack time
- Craft activities
- Song and story time

Things to think about

- Two hours can feel long, so consider what works best locally.
- School timings and proximity may affect your session length.
- Volunteer availability and capacity is crucial.

Remember, volunteers will need additional time for:

- Setting up (approx 30 minutes)
- Packing away (approx 30 minutes)

Choosing the right location, timing and session structure will make your group more accessible, sustainable and enjoyable for families and volunteers alike.

Real-life examples

At Londonderry Corps there is no on-site parking and only one hour of free parking is available locally. As a result, many attendees have to pay for parking and walk to the hall. The group therefore operates on a donation basis rather than a fixed fee, to offset the cost of parking.



‘When looking for a group, it’s important to have good free parking.’

Childminder, Londonderry Corps Stay and Play



‘An early start helps that accommodates the school run.’

Parent, Londonderry Corps Stay and Play

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2.3 Building the Right Team

A strong, supportive, creative and well-prepared team is essential for creating a safe, welcoming and effective parent and toddler group. This section will guide you through recruiting, building and supporting your team.

2.3.1 Define what you need from your team

Before you start recruiting, take time to consider what values your team members will need to represent. These may include the Family Ministry values of:

- Christ-centredness
- Justice
- Creativity
- Diversity
- Celebration
- Intergenerational
- Hospitality

You can learn more about the Family Ministry values through a set of colouring sheets, exploring the different characteristics.

Useful link

- [Family Ministry values colouring sheets \(salvationist.org.uk\)](https://salvationist.org.uk)

Roles

Consider what roles team members will take on. These may include:

- Leading (criminal background check required) **See Section 3.5.5**
- Hosting (criminal background check may be required) **See Section 3.5.5**
- Administration
- Set up and pack down



- Registration
- Connecting with families
- Preparation of resources
- Circle time
- Story time
- Song time
- Prayer time
- Refreshments

Salvation Army parent and toddler groups are great places to share the good news of Jesus within the team and with the families attending, so make sure your team includes committed Christians who are willing to join in with this mission and ministry.

Volunteers

How many volunteers you will need will depend on the size of your group and the space you will be working in. Ensure that the space enables parents/carers to be able to see their children and that the space doesn't feel too busy or crowded.

2.3.2 Employees

Parent and toddler group leaders can be employees and the Human Resources team are available to support you through the process.

Salvation Army Policies, resources and the Human Resource team will assist you with the following activities:

- Creating a new post or advertising an existing position.
- Creating a compelling advert.
- Assessing applications.
- Interviewing.
- Making the offer and ensuring all pre-employment checks are gathered in line with policy and legislation, including undertaking criminal record background checks as appropriate. **See Section 3.5.5**
- Providing guidance on managing and supporting employees.
- Ensuring safer recruitment practices are followed and maintained throughout the process.

Always refer to the **Human Resources** (HR) section on OurHub to ensure you are working to the most up-to-date guidance.



Consulting with your HR business partner and your territorial community engagement lead (TCEL) will also help with policies and processes as you build your team.

Further guidance

- **HR Policies and *HR04 Recruitment Policy*** (OurHub)
- Appendices 1 and 2 have examples of parent and toddler group leader and team member job/role descriptions, to help you through advertising and recruitment processes.

2.3.3 Volunteers

Parent and toddler group leaders can be employees, though most members of the team will be volunteers.

Salvation Army Policies and resources will assist you in undertaking the following activities:

- Creating a job/role advert and deciding where to advertise.
- Creating an application form and application process including requesting references.
- Ensuring safer recruitment practices are followed.
- Assessing applications.
- Interviewing.
- Undertaking criminal record background checks as appropriate. **See Section 3.5.5**
- Managing and supporting volunteers.

Always refer to the **Volunteering** section on OurHub to ensure you are working to the most up-to-date guidance.

Consulting with your HR business partner and your territorial community engagement lead (TCEL) will also help with policies and processes as you build your team.

Further guidance

- **HR Policies** (OurHub)
- **Volunteer information** (OurHub)
- ***Volunteer parent and toddler group leader*** job/role description (OurHub)



- **Appendices 1 and 2** have examples of parent and toddler group leader and team member job/role descriptions, to help you through advertising and recruitment processes.
- **Volunteering resources** (salvationist.org.uk)

For any questions concerning this section, please contact:
volunteering@salvationarmy.org.uk

2.3.4 Building and supporting your team

Once your team is in place you will need to consider the following:

Required learning and development

This may include:

- Safeguarding at the level relevant to the role. Consult your relevant safeguarding lead and **Safeguarding Policies and information** (OurHub)
- **Safe Mission** (OurHub)
- First aid
- Food hygiene
- Fire safety
- Emergency procedures
- Parent and toddler training

Ongoing support

Ongoing bespoke support for different roles including ensuring team members know how to contact the leader and how to raise concerns. HR and volunteer policies give advice on this.

Team meetings

Regular team meetings help to:

- build relationships within the team,
- set culture and vision,
- share information, and
- encourage and engage team members.

You may need to have team meetings more frequently in the initial stages of the group.



2.3.5 Valuing and celebrating volunteers

Celebrating and valuing volunteers is essential, as these individuals give their time, care and energy to create welcoming spaces where families can connect, feel supported and grow in community. Recognising their contributions not only affirms their worth but also strengthens their sense of belonging and encourages continued service.

You can do this in a number of meaningful ways:

- Publicly thanking volunteers during sessions or Sunday meetings.
- Hosting an appreciation event.
- Giving small, personalised gifts.
- Regularly praying for and with them.

Simple acts of gratitude and encouragement can help volunteers feel seen, valued and deeply connected to the mission of The Salvation Army.

