



HELLO!

Like many others, Captains Nick and Shelley Ward - who both share an enthusiasm and belief that nature can help nurture wellbeing and faith - had been exploring new possibilities to adapt Family Ministries during the pandemic. Developing and implementing Get OWT! at a time when everything had to change really is evidence of God's hand, the initial vision and plans for using outdoor space needing very little amending to create a Covid-19 safe setting for the biggest group linked to Acklam Corps.

This resource has been widely used since its launch and has been customised by leaders to suit different settings and situations accordingly.

A message from Nick and Shelley –

In this guide we simply share our experience with you in the hope that it goes some way in helping you understand what Get OWT! is and why we chose to start it. We hope that the thoughts we share might offer you some practical pointers as you think about starting Get OWT! in your own context.

THE NEED TO GET OWT!

'We have two young children of our own and when we think back to the lockdown, we remember it was somewhat challenging at times. On several occasions we just needed to get out of the house! Getting outside and interacting in nature's playground is important.'

Research tells us that connecting with nature is good for our physical and mental health. It raises vitamin levels, nurtures creativity, and inspires problem-solving. And as people of faith, we understand that appreciation of and engagement in God's creation aids our spiritual wellbeing too.

'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.'

SO, WHAT IS 'GET OWT'?

Simply put, Get OWT! is a family-oriented programme that uses nature to nurture little ones. Families are invited to visit the Get OWT! event shelter, where they will receive a Get OWT! activity pack (see set-up checklist for contents). Each pack contains an activity sheet, outlining the four/five interactive activities planned for that week, along with talking points based on the theme. The pack also contains a wrapped snack and relevant craft materials.

We recommend you work through the following steps to determine whether Get OWT! could be the right thing for the families in your area to engage with.

ACTION 1 – HAVE A PICNIC AND PRAY

Find green space near you and take a walk around it – and why not take a picnic with you? Try to become aware of your surroundings. Who is using the space? Is it a busy or quiet area? As you walk (or eat!) pray for the families that you know and have relationships with. In your prayers, thank God for nature and bring to God the thought of setting up Get OWT! Ask God whether it's the right thing for you and your church to be doing at this time.

ACTION 2 – HAVE A CHAT WITH THE TEAM

After picnicking and praying, if you feel this is something your church ought to explore further, share your vision and thoughts with your church leadership team.

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

Consider practical matters relating to budgets and resources at this stage. After this, talk things through with your parent-and-toddler team: What are their thoughts? Is this something they would be willing to be involved in? Could they join you for more prayer and picnicking?

ACTION 3 – IDENTIFY A SUITABLE LOCATION

Get out a map and look for a suitable space for your Get OWT! event shelter. For those operating in an urban setting, it may be a green park in town. We'd advise that you look for a location that meets the following criteria:

- Large open space (field) for Get OWT! event shelter
- Wooded area – necessary for trails and woodland-based activities
- Easily accessible for prams
- Easily accessible for you (you'll not want to carry stuff too far!)
- Close to available car parking. Be aware of residential areas and limited street parking.

It is very important that you check with relevant authorities that you have permission to use the land that you've identified. We advise that you share your Risk Assessment and a Get OWT! Activity Pack with them (more information on these to follow).

Perhaps you don't have access to big woodlands or large open spaces. If so, don't worry! You can find nature in your back garden or even on your front doorstep. Could you provide Get OWT! packs for your families to use from home?

ACTION 4 – ENGAGE WITH FAMILIES

It's time to do some market research. Contact the families that you work with and ask them to share their thoughts with you. Are they aware of any existing outdoor groups that cater for young families? Is Get OWT! something that they're likely to engage with? What activities would they like to see at Get OWT? When and how often would they like it to run? Ask them to think of anything you might not have already thought about.

ACTION 5 – SAFETY FIRST!

The safety of those attending and helping you run Get OWT! is something that needs to be a priority for you and your team. Ensure that the Risk Assessment mitigates all suspected risks relating to Get OWT! considering all COVID- related (if necessary) and non-COVID-related precautions.

'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) inside every activity pack and ask families to read through the sheet before taking part in activities.'

ACTION 6 – GET THE 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. It is hoped that they understand the value of Get OWT! and are keen for it to go ahead. Then inform your DHQ of your intention to start this new programme.

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

ACTION 7 – SOURCE EQUIPMENT

Now that you're ready to start Get OWT! you can begin to think about what equipment you'll need. This will all depend on how you choose to run Get OWT! in your context. In Acklam the following equipment was needed:

- A sturdy outdoor shelter large enough for the team to social distance in (a Coleman Event ShelterProXL 4.5x4.5m worked well)
- A heavy-duty garden trolley for transporting equipment
- Set of walkie-talkies as phone signal can be poor
- A4 acrylic landscape display cases for signs
- GoPak tables and chairs for the team

ACTION 8 – ADVERTISE

Engage with the families who shared their thoughts (see Action Four) and inform them of your plans along with the start date. Then consider using your other communication channels such as Facebook etc. 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, eg, 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.

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

ACTION 9 – PLAN, PRINT AND PREPARE

Now is the time to think about putting the activity packs together. To help get you started we have included several weeks' worth of material that has been developed and used in Acklam.

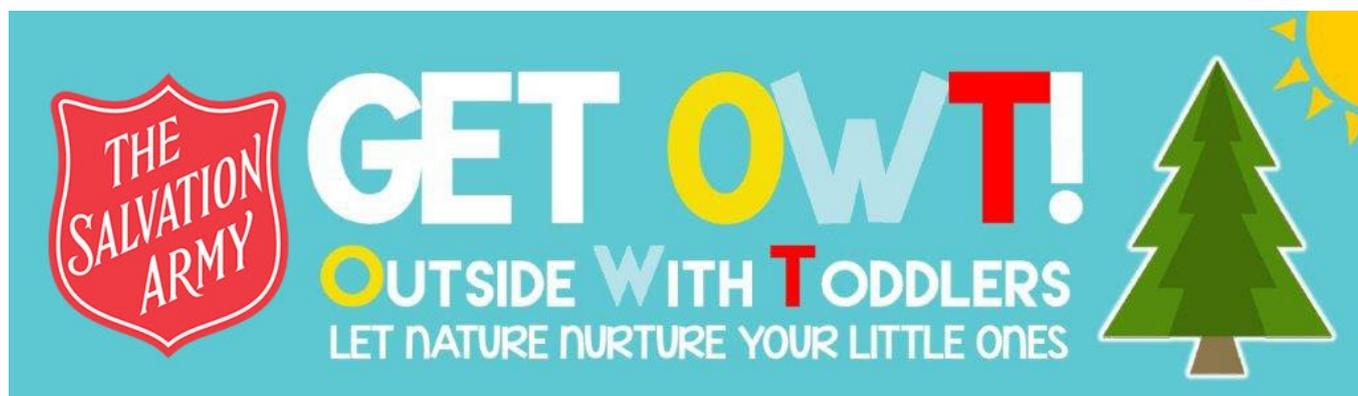
'We try to base our three/five main activities on a theme and make sure we include questions for families to think and chat about together. For us, this is a crucial part of Get OWT! Make sure you've also printed off all the necessary documents, such as the safety sheet, sign-in forms and the record of attendance. Have a think too about what snack you want to put in the packs and get these ready.'

ACTION 10 – THE FINAL HURDLE

Get the team together and do a dummy run, especially if you're working with new equipment that you haven't used before.

'We saved 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.'

Have a debrief with the team to iron out any issues – and then you're ready!



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