

HOW TO RUN A
GREAT BIG GOD
STYLE KIDS PRAISE PARTY
WRITTEN BY NIGEL HEMMING



GREAT
BIG
GOD

PART ONE

A. WHY HOLD AN EVENT? B. WHO'S GONNA DO IT? C. HOW DOES IT WORK? D. PLANNING BEFORE THE EVENT E. CREATING THE ATMOSPHERE F. UPFRONT LEADING

How To Run 'Great Big God' Style Kids Praise Party

Intro

Since the release of Great Big God in 2001, our teams have been to churches all over the UK and beyond to host 'Great Big God' live events where children can express their creativity and have fun worshipping. Over the past few years, the demand has steadily increased beyond the team's capacity and so we've responded by developing various resources which will equip people who want to put on fantastic kids events. (For more general information about these resources, please go to www.greatbiggod.com)

This aim of this brochure is to give a full and detailed run down of what is needed to host a successful children's worship event. The programme is based on a tried and tested format which we developed for Great Big God parties over the past few years. For those who lack experience, the details here will help you and your team think through everything involved in planning the event and will provide a comprehensive checklist of what to do at different stages. For others who are more experienced you should find solid principles and fresh ideas which will inspire you to go for bigger and better events. Like all good programmes, it's an assortment of new and old ideas. Some are borrowed and re-hashed deliberately and some have been taken on board subconsciously. I would like to pay tribute to the many children's workers I have rubbed shoulders with over the years as they have no doubt been an influence on the way we run our events.

I need to emphasise that this programme is not the only way to run a children's praise event. There are many seasoned children's leaders in the UK (Ishmael, Doug Horley and Jim Bailey just to mention three) who have been doing fantastic events for much longer than us, and as I hinted at above, there are many tried and tested formats on the market that really work. Our aim in producing this document is to help make great events happen using the varied talents of a local team and not necessarily needing to rely on people coming in from 'outside'. We trust you will find principles that can be applied whatever the size of your event and the resources at your disposal.

Lastly, we love feedback, as it helps us shape our work in the future, and helps us all learn from each other. As well as that, we're keen to dialogue with anyone who is passionate about working with kids, so if you've tried any of the ideas here, or your just interested, please go to our blog at www.greatbiggod.com/blogorwhatever and let us know how it went.

Enjoy!

Nigel Hemming
September 2007

Contents: Part One

- A. Why Hold An Event?
- B. Who's Gonna Do It?
- C. How Does It Work?
- D. Planning Before the Event
- E. Creating the Atmosphere
- F. Upfront Leading
- G. Technical Requirements
- H. Summary of Part One

A. WHY HOLD AN EVENT?

There are many good reasons for holding a Kids Praise Party, but first let's look at what it might achieve. When we do an event, we are usually aiming for a few simple things to happen for the children:-

- Have loads of fun & enjoy themselves.
- Praise God along with loads of other people.
- Learn about Jesus and his amazing love for them.
- Take another step on their journey of faith.
- Express their own gifts and talents in the context of worship.

Actually, if I'm honest, I think this is what church should aim for every week, although having led children's programmes for a number of years, I know that it's not always possible to achieve all these aims consistently. That's where a big event comes in!

Whether it's once a month, once a term or once a year, an event that's well publicised, well planned and well executed can achieve a massive amount and encourage everyone within your community.

Nurture Home Grown Talent vs. Bringing People In From Outside

There's a tendency for churches to look outside their own community or even their own city for gifted people to come help them put on great events. This is just as true in adults ministry as it is for children's, and there are a number of gifted people who just about make a living travelling round leading events in different churches. I'm not in any way knocking these people because I've met some of them and they are lovely genuine people who serve gladly and are great at what they do. I have done (and still do) a little bit of travelling round myself, but to be honest, my first call is to my family, and my second to my community, and that's where I want to spend the majority of my weekends. As I've contemplated this over the years I've become totally convinced that using home grown talent is the best and most sustainable way to consistently put on great events.

5 Reasons why you should consider doing events 'in house'

- They represent a genuine expression of community with different people serving one another.
- They develop solid team relationships with everyone working together towards a common goal.
- They provide opportunities for people to grow in their strengths and do things they wouldn't normally have the opportunity to do.
- They can uncover hidden talents in people which would have otherwise stayed hidden.
- They are an authentic expression in the life of your church community – reflecting the people who are with you, the journey you are on together and the reasons why God has put you in the place he has.

B. WHO'S GONNA DO IT?

But what if we just don't have the people or resources?

It may not be possible to do a big event 'in house' straight away, but let's stop and take a long term view! I'm guessing that one of the reasons you are reading this is because you have a vision/passion/excitement for working with kids. I'm guessing that you want to see young people in your community connecting with Jesus, expressing their faith and living out the Kingdom of God. I'm guessing you believe that having fantastic kids events in your area will help this happen, and that you want to see them happen. If I'm right about all these things, then without a shadow of a doubt, the best person to make this happen in the long term is YOU. You have the vision, the energy and the drive to make this happen even if you don't have the skills or the confidence, and this document is for you.

Start small!

In the rest of this document you will find a number suggestions & ideas that could just as easily be adapted to your regular program – be it a Sunday school, kids club or whatever. Why not start by just taking one or two of them that are new and trying them out on a small scale before attempting something big. If you find that they work, then branch out a bit. Use some of our principles within your existing programs. If you want to grow then check out the web for other resources, seek out conferences and training, and prioritise to be there so you can learn more.

Recruit a team – don't wait for volunteers!

(This is a big one and applies across the board in all areas of church life)

The simple fact is that people like to be asked to get involved with things. If you advertise for volunteers, you may get one or two, but you are unlikely to get enough people. Have a good think about who might have time or talents to offer or might enjoy being part of the team and approach them directly. If you don't know people well enough, ask around. Don't just go for the obvious ones, think about who's got some time on their hands, who's just fun to be around, who's got time for people, or special skills or interests. If you get the chance to share with a large group of people, look for who's responding with positive body language (i.e. smiling, nodding, sitting forward or looking interested) and approach them afterwards. Even if people aren't able to say yes to you, they still prefer to have been asked because it makes them feel valued and people are much more likely to say yes when asked than offer their services cold.

Over the years we have found that the best way to recruit people is to share vision and then offer them the opportunity to get involved. Don't ever start by saying "We need volunteers to fill a space..." Vision attracts people, not need or gaps on a rota. It's better to start with the vision, e.g. "I'm excited about...", "We have a fantastic opportunity here...", or "Would it be great if...", and then follow up with "Would you like to be involved?" or "I've been thinking that with your specific skill/strength you might like to..."

Don't pressurise anyone into a hasty decision – give them some time to think about it, and where possible, offer people options with different levels of buy-in (i.e. differentiate between simple roles which just involve turning up on the day to help, and greater roles which require more specific preparation, and offer both if you can).

Lastly, a cautionary note about teachers, who tend to possess many of the required skills and can

be natural targets for recruiting when it comes to kids teams. If they are willing to join your team, you'll find they'll generally have a lot of valuable experience to offer. Sometimes they are happy to help, but would rather have a simple non-contact role (i.e. refreshments) rather than be up front so make sure you offer that. If they're not up for it, don't pressurise them! Working with kids is tiring enough and sometimes you just need a weekend off.

Use your young people as a work force.

Teenagers and even older children can be very valuable team members. Depending on their level of maturity, they respond well when given a certain amount of responsibility (with some guidance and oversight). This can be very positive as they have plenty of energy to bring and their enthusiasm can be very infectious. They Teenagers can be fantastic role models for children to look up to (particularly boys) whether in an up front role, or working with a smaller group. They tend to enjoy working alongside other teens, and sometimes need a little bit of extra help with organisation and transport, but I will always look for opportunities to involve young people in any teams I am leading.

Work with another church or group.

If you don't have the resources to pull off an event on your own, why not consider putting on an event with another church or group of churches in your local area. Although different churches sometimes have their own way of doing things, when it comes to working with children, many share common aims, and most would be able to sign up to those we mentioned earlier. The most important part of working with other churches is developing strong relationships. You need to know the key people in the other churches – and like them! If you don't know the children's leaders from your local churches then why not start by getting in touch & inviting them for a coffee and a chat. Genuine partnership only works when there is real relationship and trust built. An event can really help that process but it must start with shared vision.

Get someone in from outside but make sure they invest in your people!!!!

Sometimes it is necessary and valuable to get 'experts' in from outside. As I said earlier, they usually do a great job, but instead of just letting them do the whole event themselves in their way, why not explain what you're trying to do and suggest they work with you by coming to do a training session with members of your team at the same time. Make sure you have identified a number of people with potential who are worth investing in (i.e. are they sticking around for the next couple of years? Do they have the time to get involved? Are they interested?) and then maximise the contact time they have and look for opportunities for them get involved. For example, if you think you have someone who could be a great host but lacks a bit of confidence or experience, ask your 'expert' to spend some time with them on the day, and then let them host a small part of the event alongside so they gain valuable experience. You can pretty much apply this principle to any aspect of the event, and 'experts' should be more than willing to invest in good people or people who have potential.

C. HOW DOES IT WORK?

This section looks at the nuts and bolts of the event itself. The specific details are all based on the 'Great Big God' format we have developed over time. Depending on your experience you may prefer to mix and match different elements, but for the benefit of those who are new to this, we've produced a detailed run down of the whole event and what's needed to make it happen.

A Brief Overview

The event itself comprises 3 main sections – two of which are 'upfront', and one where the kids break down into smaller workshops. The Introduction where we welcome the kids with familiar songs and a game or two, introduce the theme and teach a couple of new songs. Then the workshops give the children an opportunity to use their own talents and work on something which they can share back later. After a short break, the Celebration gives the children a chance to share what they have worked on in their workshops as well as enjoying more songs, games & stories and a chance for a prayer response. The timetable for the afternoon usually looks something like this:-

2:00pm	Arrival/Registration & Introductory Activities.
2:15pm	Introduction: Songs, Games, Introduce Theme, Learn new songs etc
2:45pm	Creative Workshops
3:25pm	Refreshments/toilet break
3:30pm	Celebration: Songs, Games, Stories, Feedback from workshops, Response.
4:30pm	End

Key Roles

The following table gives a run down of the key roles associated with putting on an event of this scale with a brief summary of what is required and what specific skills may be needed. We will go into detail about each area below, but this will give you an overview of the kind of people you need on your team. You don't necessarily need a separate person for each role as some people will be able to cover several areas, but the following list should help you make sure that all the bases are covered.

Title	Role Requirements	Specific Skills Needed
Event Co-ordinator	Provide vision, enthusiasm & leadership. Co-ordinate the activities of the core team. Ensure good communication across the team.	Energy, Enthusiasm, Vision. Administration, Delegation. Good Communication skills.
Publicity	Create publicity materials (posters, flyers, tickets) Contact local groups/churches to publicise event.	Artistic / Creative
Bookings/Tickets	Sell tickets. Take advance bookings. Be available for questions from people who might come.	Financial, Admin
Decoration	Decorate the venue with balloons/streamers etc	Creative/ Fun
Registration (usually need 2 or 3 people on the door)	Meet & Greet people on the door. Take money from those who haven't pre-booked. Book kids into specific workshops as they come in.	Friendly, Welcoming. Financial, Admin
Workshop Ldrs (one for each workshop)	Plan and prepare 40 minute creative workshop for a group of children in whatever area of gifting you have. Ensure all rooms and equipment are ready. (See below for more details)	Specific Strengths/Talents Organisation, Communication.
Up-Front hosting	Host the event from the front including leading games, actions, singing, ministry, stories etc Build a rapport with the children.	Energetic, Funky. Child Friendly. Good Communication.
Worship Leaders	Plan songs and make sure everyone knows them. Give a solid musical & vocal lead on the day. Put together a band & rehearse before the event.	Musical/Band Leading. Confident Worship Leader Experience of children.
Communications	Plan stories/talks and deliver them on the day. Prepare visual aids/props/power points before.	Up front communication, Story telling.
Dance/Actions	Gather a team & devise/learn actions/dances. Lead dance/actions from the front during songs.	Movement/Dance.
Audio/PA	Provide & operate PA system appropriate to the size of venue. Ensure all equipment meets safety standards. Liase with the band to get a good clear sound.	Sound Engineering.
Lighting	Provide & operate lighting effects appropriate to the venue (& budget) Ensure all equipment meets safety standards.	Technical/Lighting
Visual/Projection	Provide & operate projection facilities for the event.	Technical/Computers
Health & Safety	Ensure health & safety procedures are known by the all the team & adhered to. Provide Risk Assessments where necessary.	Health & Safety Fist Aid

Once you've recruited a team you can start to think through the details of the event. You may already be very clear in your mind about the purpose of the event, who it's for and what it should look like, but if you're new to this, you might find it helpful to think through some of the details and decide together what is going to happen. In the section, I have tried to communicate some of our values (why we do things the way we do) which have evolved over a number of years. Our way is not the only way though, and you may choose to do certain things differently from us. Go for it! My main concern is that you have the opportunity to think through each aspect of the event before you get going!

D. PLANNING BEFORE THE EVENT

Who's Going to Come?

It might seem like a basic question, but it's always good to think about who the event is for! As I said in the introduction, a Children's Praise Party can be a real boost to a church group, but there are various other groups of children who might really benefit from being part of it. Children who wouldn't normally come to church will find it much more accessible environment than on a Sunday morning, and there are bound to be some local children who will really enjoy it. You may have links to a local school, or an after school activity, or another children's club, or the children in your church may bring friends from their schools. The key here is relationship. Most children will come because they know someone – whether another child, or a familiar adult. It would be good to think through where children might come from so you can make a realistic guess at numbers and plan your publicity strategically. You may wish to invite children from other local churches, but again, the key here is relationship. There aren't many people who will just come to an event unless they have a link or know someone. If you don't have many local links, maybe now is the time to start praying for opportunities.

What Age?

Our events are broadly aimed at children age 5-11. In general, the younger children tend to enjoy it more if their parents are with them to help them have fun, and some 3's & 4's may well get a lot out of it, but generally we tend to keep to the primary age. If the age range is very broad, it might be good to differentiate the workshops with some aimed at older children and some at younger (more later). I have always encouraged parents to accompany children to these events and made it mandatory for under 8's. This means that you need less team members to monitor the children, and also I really want to encourage families to worship and have fun together.

When & Where?

We tend to do our events on Saturday afternoons, usually starting around 2pm. This tends to suit families – though make sure it doesn't clash with a major sporting event first! We have also done them during school holidays or occasionally on public holidays. We have done one or two events in the early evening (say 5-7.30ish) though obviously then meal time becomes an issue and may provide a barrier to some of the very young ones.

When you're deciding the venue for your event, location is a factor to consider. Is it easy to find and is there adequate parking available for those with cars? What about transport links? Is it on a bus or train route? We have tended to use mainly churches, schools or community centres that are usually well equipped with multi purpose rooms. You can be fairly flexible with the event itself, but you will definitely need a good sized hall, preferably with a stage (or space to bring in stage blocks) and a number of smaller ancilliary spaces for workshops. If you're not sure about the numbers coming, you get a much batter atmosphere being a bit squashed in a smaller room than rattling around in a large hall. (Obviously you need to pay attention to fire regs) If the venue is already equipped with PA & lighting gear, that can save a lot of time & effort as long as there is someone on hand to operate it.

Title/Branding/Publicity

It's very important to think about what you're going to call your event – and particularly if you have it in mind to repeat it at regular intervals. For our events, we always use the 'Great Big God' title and logo as it represents not only a song but a brand which some people may recognise. Even if they don't we think the artwork is catchy, looks reasonably funky, and communicates our vision.

There is no easy way to think up a name for an event and to be authentic, you need to come up with something that captures the heart of what you're trying to do, sounds appealing & catchy, and lends itself to graphics and art work.

When it comes to graphic design, I would strongly advise you to find someone who has an eye for creating catchy graphics. There are a number of design packages around for the computer and many people can put something together in Microsoft Publisher, but it's worth spending some time on as posters using basic clipart pics and the comic sans font can look a bit tired & cheap! If you don't have the capability to explore using photos and funky graphics, I suggest you find someone who does and beg them to put a flyer and/or poster together for you. It doesn't need loads on info on it – just the basic details, but it does need to communicate something of the vibe of the event. Also, once the basic design is done, it can always be repeated for a later event.

Children are really used to 'branding' and it is not too hard to follow the theme through the event by using the logo on tickets, badges, stickers and signs you use on the day. If you have a budget, you might even want to get the logo printed on some balloons and/or tee shirts. It all helps the children feel that they're part of something cool. One last thought, make sure that you 'test' any designs out on a few of your target audience (and their parents) before you go into mass production.

Tickets

There's not a lot to say about this and there are a number of different ways of doing tickets. It's good practise to charge something for an event as people will value it more and it helps to cover the costs (even if not completely). What you charge will depend on local factors and how much budget you have in the first place. You will always get people who decide to come at the last minute, but if you can persuade people to commit early, then it helps in the planning, and also others will decide to come if they know their friends have already bought or reserved a ticket.

Registration On The Day

You need someone in charge of this area who is organised! There needs to be facility for those who have pre-booked to sign in as well as for people to pay on the door. On entry, we usually have a separate area where we ask people to sign up for a workshop and give them a coloured sticker accordingly to identify them later. Some of our workshops have a limited number of places, offered on a first come first served basis, so this system really helps things to run smoothly later in the transition to workshops.

E. CREATING THE ATMOSPHERE

Decorating the room

If at all possible, I would strongly advise decorating the main room before the event. You can let your creativity run riot with balloons, streamers, stickers, posters, banners etc etc. There's no specific formula to it, but I think that the more effort you put in, the more the children will feel valued and will be drawn into the room straight away. On a recent trip to California we had the opportunity of visiting Universal Studios and on the 'citywalk' leading to the main theme park, we were struck by how bright and colourful the shops, hoardings and lights were. We were immediately 'drawn in' and we even commented on how attractive these kinds of things would be for children.

I would advise clearing the room of chairs and just leaving a few around the edge for those that really need them. If at all possible, try & get the chairs moved completely out of the room rather than stacked up in a corner, but if that isn't possible, try and disguise/decorate them as best you can.

Welcome Activities

As well as decorating the room, it really helps children to feel at home if there are things to do straight away and people who are there specifically to greet them. When you go to see a show, for example, having someone in costume greeting you on the door all adds to the experience. It tends to take a while for everyone who's coming to arrive, and particularly to go through the registration process and sign up for workshops, so we usually plan a couple of flexible activities which the children can do as they come in:-

Badge Making: Place a few tables around the back of the main hall with paper & pens on for the children to make their own badge. Some will spend a long time on this & others not, but if you have the badge machine on another table with an adult to monitor it, they can get their badges stamped and made when they are ready. If you're expecting large numbers, you may need more tables (we don't bother with chairs) and a second machine!

Parachute Games: This activity works really well as it can happen with a few or lots of children and they can be included as soon as they are ready. We use a large parachute and then play a few games with it. It needs at least one of our team members to lead it (and if they have a handheld radio mic, it helps them be heard above the general noise). There are loads of parachute games, but in this context we tend to stick to more simple ones which everyone can join in easily, for example:-

- Para-swap:** Number the children around the circle, say one to six. Lift the chute and on the third go shout a number, these children then have to swap places under the canopy before it falls to earth. They need to be told to head for gaps, keep their eyes open and try to avoid bumping into one another. Make sure that the those who remain around the edge allow the canopy to fall rather than pulling it down hard.

- Para-ball:** Place a light-weight football (or beach ball) on the chute surface and experiment with moving it. What happens when you shake the parachute, can you flip the ball off over people's head? Can you develop a wave technique that will cause the ball to move in a circle? Using a small ball (tennis ball) can you drop the ball through the hole in the middle, can you stop the ball disappearing? These demand fairly sophisticated co-ordination skills, but in short spells can be fun.

These games are reproduced with kind permission from www.funandgames.org. Check out their site for a comprehensive list of parachute and other games.

Meeters & Greeters

As well as these activities, it always helps the children feel welcome if there are a few team members wandering around saying hi, particularly if they are people known to the children. If you have any puppets or team in costumes greeting the children, again these can all help to build the atmosphere.

Audio/Visual

Having music playing over the PA can also help to create the right atmosphere as long as the volume level is monitored. Ideally, it needs to be loud enough to hear the words, but not so loud it becomes dominant. We usually play songs we're going to be using in the event later – which helps the children become familiar with them. If you have the capability to run DVD or video, running one in the background while everything else is going on can also add to the general vibe. I would run the pictures but not the sound, and make sure it's something fun and child friendly. (The DVD that comes with the Great Big God 3: God's Love Is Big album would work here)

We usually allow the welcome activities to run for 15-20 minutes after the start time – or until it seems like most people are in, and then kick off the UpFront program.

F. UPFRONT LEADING

As I mentioned above, we usually split the upfront time into two main sections with workshops in between. In the second part of this article there will be some suggested event outlines which will give a specific running order, but at this stage it is worth discussing the main elements which are common to all of the UpFront program.

Worship/Music

In our Key Roles table above, we mentioned three main aspects of the worship leader's role that need to happen for the event to succeed:-

Songs: You need to choose songs which are fun and lend themselves to actions, which the children will enjoy, which express solid biblical truth in accessible language, and which relate to some of the themes of the day. If you know there are songs which some of the children will already know from school, clubs or church it would be good to include some of them. There is loads of good children's worship material in the public domain and if you don't know where to start, the suggested running orders in appendix 1 include a number of tried and tested songs from the Great Big God albums which you can buy online at www.vineyardrecords.co.uk Elsewhere on the site we also recommend a number of albums by other children's worship leaders which you might want to consider.

Worship Leader(s): The worship leader needs to be able to give a good musical and vocal lead for all the songs. They might be a guitarist or keyboard player who also leads the band, or they may be a vocalist who does more jumping around and leading the actions. Either way, they need to be responsible for leading the singing confidently so that the children know what to do. They will need to know the songs (and actions) well, and be prepared to prompt everyone where necessary – pointing out which part of the song is coming next. If the worship leader is not playing an instrument, then one of the musicians should take the role of 'band leader' and be the person who sets the tempo and groove of each song as well as communicating with the other musicians what is happening next. In this case, the worship leader and band leader need to have good eye contact and communication, and it may need a couple of rehearsals to develop this.

Actions are an essential element of children's worship as they give the kids something to do with their hands and bodies, and get them involved straight away before they have even learned the song. Before singing each song, I quickly talk through the words and teach the actions to the children so even if the song is new, it is familiar as soon as the band starts playing.

Band: I would suggest the minimum band might include drums, bass, electric guitar, keyboard and an acoustic guitar with at least two vocalists. You may want to add a sax, flute, percussion or extra guitar depending on who is available. It helps if these are musicians who are used to playing together, and some time to practise and learn the songs is essential. It may help for the worship leader to give the CDs to the musicians a few weeks before so they can take time to learn the songs. For the GBG songs, the chord charts can all be found on the CD rom section of each album. If you are desperate and can't beg, borrow, or steal musicians from anywhere, it is possible to use backing tracks (or even just regular CD tracks) but you will still need a strong vocal lead and you'll have to work harder to make the atmosphere (eg. Bigger actions team, more lights, video etc).

Actions Team: It's essential to have a team of people who know the actions/dance movements and can lead from the front during each song. Depending on who is leading, they may be simple actions, sign language or dance movements. As long as they are led with enthusiasm it doesn't really matter what emphasis you have. The worship leader or host may also be doing the actions,

but it's important that at least two other people (one on each side of the stage) are up front just doing actions for the kids to follow. They need to have rehearsed beforehand, making sure they all do the same movements at the same time. It is ESSENTIAL that the team includes at least one boy/man – so the younger boys at the event have a credible role model to follow. If you have some talented teenagers, this is one way they could get involved. The actions team might want to co-ordinate what they wear on the day to make them stand out a bit more.

Hosting

It's important that the main host(s) are confident and can build a rapport with a large crowd of children. They need to introduce the event and link between each element of the program. Even if each element has someone else who is leading it, the hosts need to provide some continuity, and should be visibly involved, helping to lead games, actions, singing and ministry.

Communication

The communication is a vital element of the event, and it's important to have someone who can confidently tell stories and talk to the children in a way that engages them. Telling bible stories is an essential element of the event and contrasts well with the loud and active slot. There are many ways to tell stories and we don't have time to go deeply into the subject but just a few simple keys are: 1. Tell the story AS a story (don't just read it out), 2. Find ways to get the children involved – acting out certain words, becoming part of the story in some way, 3. Be visual where possible using visual aids, pictures or props, and 4. Plan & rehearse the story so you know it well and can deliver it confidently.

Depending on the event and how well you know the children, it may be appropriate to give a brief application talk after the story which helps them understand how to put the biblical truth into practise. I would advise keeping this short (2-3 mins max), simple, clear and visual if possible (i.e. use pictures or PowerPoint to reinforce your one or two main points).

Games

Essentially you can do two types of games – those which include everyone, and those which include some people up front and are fun for everyone else to watch. I tend to go for the first type as I like to get the children active and having fun together but the second type can work too – especially if there is mess involved! Party games and their variations can work well with large numbers though obviously it all depends on how many children you have & how easy they are to manage. A couple of very simple favourites which we use are:-

Groupie: The band plays & everyone dances around. When the music stops a number is called and the children have to get into a group with that number in it. Once they are in it, they sit down. Adults can come in & out to make up the numbers. We don't look for winners or losers, just keep it fast moving and fun.

Touch: Everyone finds a partner and again dances around together. When the music stops the leader calls out body parts which have to touch ie. elbows', knees, toes, ears etc

Other Upfront Elements:

There are a number of other elements you may choose to incorporate into your upfront program including puppets, drama or demonstrations. It all depends on what your theme is and what talents people have. I would simply say that it's important that whatever you do has been planned to fit with the theme and enhance your communication, must be good quality, well rehearsed and presented, and short & snappy.

G. TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Every venue has its' own technical requirements, and many will have in house systems which will do the job more than adequately. Experience counts for everything here, and I would suggest you recruit people who know what they are doing. I don't propose to go into detail here, simply to provide a check list of things to think through:-

Stage: Using a stage is very helpful as it allows everyone to see what is going on, even if it's only a foot from the ground. Make sure it's big enough for band and dancers!

PA system: It's essential that you use a system that has been designed for music (not just speech) and which works in the venue you are using. Even though it doesn't have to be loud, a good PA will give you clarity in music and speech. I would simply ensure that there is clear communication between the worship leader/band and engineer well before the event, and that you allow plenty of time for soundchecking.

Hint: It is important to distinguish clearly between rehearsal time and soundcheck time. Rehearsal should ideally happen before the day so that there is plenty of sound check time to actually check and balance the sound mix rather than squeeze in last minute rehearsals.

Lighting: Afternoon events don't usually require much lighting, though depending on the ability to black out the room, having some form of ambient and/or stage lighting will definitely enhance the party. Make sure that all the equipment is fully tested, certified safe, and operated by someone who knows what they are doing.

Projection: If we are asking people to join in the songs, then it will be important to project the words for people in some way. In our experience, projection works infinitely better than having song sheets as it leaves the children's hands free for actions, and keeps them looking up at the front. You can use OHP sheets though they look a bit out of date and tend to spill a lot of light. Using a PC and data projector is a good way of engaging the kids – especially as you can backdrop your words with still or moving images. Microsoft powerpoint is the old school way of doing it, or you can get hold of projection software such as Easy Worship, Song pro or Song Smart which makes the job very easy. Someone will need to cut and paste the words of the songs in if they're not there already. Having the facility to project images can also really help with stories & talks and DVD clips are also a brilliant way of engaging with kids who spend their life in a visually driven culture.

H. SUMMARY OF PART ONE

If you've ready through all of this and you're still up for it, then congratulations. Please remember that in writing this article we are simply trying to share all that we have learned as we've travelled around hosting events over the past few years. If you take one or two ideas away for use with your children's group then that would be fantastic.

In part two of this article, we will be looking at the various creative workshops we have hosted over the years including templates for download, and offering some suggested outline running orders for themed events using the Great Big God songs. In the meantime, please do give us feedback on that you've read.