

# Cleaning is our ministry

How a local church and an enterprising woman have taken practical action to help others. By Suzanne Green

Five years ago a bedraggled boy walked into my classroom crying because he had been bullied once again for wearing a dirty uniform to school," says Joyce. "I decided to dig deeper and find out why his uniform was always dirty.

"What he told me broke my heart. His mum had cancer and struggled to cope with doing the laundry and other chores. She had asked her son to put his uniform in the wash himself, but he had forgotten. I realised that this child was not at risk, but in need. And I vowed to do what I could to make sure children like Steven receive whatever practical support they need at home. This was the inspiration behind Grant a Smile."

Joyce's first step was to search the internet, looking for a charity or organisation that could assist families who need practical help with tasks such as cleaning and gardening. But her efforts proved fruitless. So Joyce decided to take action to help the families she knew, and thousands of others in their position. She quit her teaching job, and cleaned several homes on her own – free of charge – before launching Grant a Smile in late 2017.

"Ours is the only social enterprise providing practical support for families with life-limiting conditions," Joyce explains. "We help those who are drained by the emotional, physical and mental struggle of being ill. We go to their homes and clean, declutter, do laundry, iron and garden, all free of charge. But we don't stop there. We also do all we can to grant wishes to the parents' unsung heroes, their children."

Those who receive help from Grant a Smile suffer from illnesses such as cancer, limited sight, fibromyalgia, ME/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, scoliosis and depression among others. "Poor health can strike anyone at any time," says Joyce, "and it's great to know that you are not alone when this happens. We need more love, compassion and kindness in the world."

Vivian Wood and her family received help from Grant a Smile. "I was diagnosed with ME, chronic depression, severe rheumatoid arthritis and more," she says. "A friend told me about Grant a Smile and I got in touch, despite my initial reservations. I have three children, aged 8, 11 and 25. The first time the Smile Heroes volunteer came to our house, I cried my eyes out. She gave me the kind of practical support I had needed for more than 10 years. My

Joyce Obaseki, a Christian based in Essex, taught primary school for 16 years before launching Grant a Smile, a new social enterprise that supports parents with life-limiting or chronic illnesses



*We help those who are struggling with life-limiting illnesses*

Suzanne Green is a freelance journalist based in Edinburgh

kids had suffered so much because of my illness, and I often wished they could get a break and just function as normal kids do. I lost my husband to cancer a few years ago, and that made things even harder. But things are better now. The house feels fresh and clean, and we are a happier family. If you are looking for real angels, call Grant a Smile!"

In order to qualify for support parents fighting life-limiting conditions must have children living with them. Eligible families can refer themselves or can be referred by family, friends, GPs, schools, hospitals or social services.

To find out more visit: [www.grantasmile.org.uk](http://www.grantasmile.org.uk)

Clean for Good, an accredited London Living Wage Employer, was launched late last year, with a vision to provide a fairer deal for cleaners, and change how cleaning is done across London and throughout the UK.

Every day the City of London relies on an army of 'hidden' workers. They receive low wages for working anti-social hours, often in poor conditions. There's little scope for advancement.

But a church in the heart of the city, St Andrew by the Wardrobe, resolved to challenge this situation. They wanted to find a practical way to help low-paid workers in their wealthy parish. And they came up with the idea of setting up a cleaning company that could provide suitable work for cleaners and act as an example to other cleaning companies by paying its workers the Living Wage.

Their idea won a 'dragon's den' competition at the Greenbelt Festival, and the church worked in partnership with the Centre for Theology & Community and other investors, including the Church Mission Society, to establish Clean for Good.

Jonny Baker, director of Church Mission Society's mission pioneer programme, believes that initiatives such as this one will determine the future health of the Church. He says, "Clean for Good is a potent combination of pioneering mission, social enterprise and God's love. It is practical mission in action."

Clean for Good takes the fair trade principle and applies it to the cleaning industry. Catherine Pearson, the company's business manager, says, "We know there are organisations who want ethical cleaning, and who are prepared to pay a fair price for it."

The new company is committed to providing its employees with paid leave, guaranteed working hours, training and personal development opportunities.

The official launch on 5th October 2017 was an opportunity to celebrate the work already done by the Clean for Good team, and to get the company up and running. It brought together investors, customers, staff and cleaners, as well as supporters. The event marked the start of a major campaign to find new customers and establish the business as London's first ethical cleaning provider.

Clean for Good is seeking to secure cleaning contracts across London, with the aim of breaking even financially in 2018 and continuing to grow.

To find out more visit [www.cleanforgood.co.uk](http://www.cleanforgood.co.uk)

A church in London has applied fair trade to the cleaning industry



Photos by Katie Garner

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