

Amaze report on Grace for the Next Generation Ltd.

Summary

Grace for the Next Generation exists to promote good quality Christian children's work. It will help churches to reach more children and to cater for their needs. This will be done by undertaking research, providing training, mentoring and other services.

The Grace Project exists to help churches to reach children. It currently provides churches in the Midlands with a part-time, professional children's worker. This is someone with experience, training and the skills needed to develop/sustain a successful children's work programme.

Grace achieves what it sets out to. In every church they have worked in there has been an improvement in the ability of that church to connect with children and families in ways that meet the needs of that community. Even when Grace has moved on from a church it almost always leaves a legacy of volunteers able to continue the ministry, creating lasting links to children and families in the community.

Amaze is pleased to recommend Grace as a safe and effective solution for churches with limited resources to build up a lasting ministry with children and families.

Background to Amaze report on Grace for the Next Generation Ltd.

27th August 2012

Amaze has been asked to write a report and recommendations on Grace for the Next Generation Limited (Grace) with the following brief:

"A report written by someone neutral to be given to churches considering using Grace and to people who might consider recommending us to churches. The report will indicate whether Grace is a trustworthy and effective organisation to partner with. The report could go on our website and be quoted on Grace literature. This report should fit onto two sides of A4."

Resources used in writing this report:

1. Document entitled "Operation of Grace for the Next Generation Ltd in the first Five Years
2. Table of employees and churches worked at from 2007 to 2012
3. Timesheet summaries April to June 2012
4. Table of appraisal scores for all staff at Feb 2012
5. 2012 Appraisals for Anna, Kasia, Kev, Angie, Ellen, Jane, Miriam and Rachel
6. Grace project 5th Birthday Reviews from 15 churches
7. 3 latest Grace Newsletters
8. Grace latest accounts
9. Independent examiners report by William Poole (financial)
10. Directors report
11. Bank statements from HSBC (to 16th July 2012) and NatWest (to 13th July 2012)
12. Memorandum and articles summary
13. Supervision record for Miriam dated 19th April 2012
14. Exit Interview record for Ellen dated 6th August 2012
15. Curriculum Vitae of Rachel Coupe, Managing Children's Worker of Grace
16. Grace staff handbook 2011
17. Grace website
18. Summary of receipts received from churches

Before getting into the detail of the task a note about the relationship between Grace and Amaze.

Grace became a Group member of Amaze in March 2009. Through this membership Grace receives information, advice and guidance on employment and management of workers and on children's work policy and practice.

Grace has also used Amaze to provide induction training to its workers on 3 of its annual training events and has employed Amaze to review policies and procedures and finally to conduct this report. Notwithstanding the on-going relationship of client and service provider, for which Grace pays a fee to Amaze, this report is written in an unbiased manner with a view to helping Grace to improve its operations and capability to deliver its mission.

Leon Coates *Assoc CIPD*
Amaze Director

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Structure

Grace was established as a Limited Company (number 6293494) in June 2007 and became a registered charity (number 1122162) in January 2008. The board of trustees of the charity currently comprises Rachel, Jenny, Jane, Bruce and Richard. The board jointly manages the project manager – Rachel Coupe (founder) and Rachel manages all 9 of the Grace children's Workers. Managing 9 (in addition to all other management activity) has been challenging but has not stopped Grace delivering effectively to churches. In fact it is because of its effectiveness that Grace has grown so quickly, needing to recruit staff every year to keep up with demand. In 2013 Grace hopes to recruit volunteers and / or interns to support their ministry.

Staff

Grace Workers go through a robust and effective recruitment and selection process before being appointed. There is a job and person description detailing the key tasks in the role and the essential and desired qualities of the successful applicant. From this a thorough interview process, including practical tasks involving children's work, form the selection process. The panel making decisions includes representatives from churches using Grace services; so all stakeholders are involved in the process. Further evidence of effective recruitment is that there have been no dismissals since the project started.

Each worker splits his or her time between different churches. A full time Grace worker, for example, might work for 4 different churches, 1 day per week and 1 Sunday per month at each.

In the Grace Worker job description the organisation recognises that this role can be stressful and more demanding than a typical Christian children's work post. This is due to the travel between locations, being a pioneer - sometimes building work from scratch, and the dispersed nature of the team. Further evidence of this is in feedback given by team members in appraisals.

Grace has adopted 41 policy documents around employment and children's work practice, referred to in the staff handbook. These provide Grace Workers with information that both enables them to do the job and demonstrates what they can expect in terms of the way they are managed. This is a good mix of policy (such as Health and Safety, using IT, Performance Management etc.) and practical (such as Amaze Best Practice Manual, Bible verses about children, and child protection).

Grace has a Performance Management policy, ensuring that workers have regular supervision sessions and an annual appraisal that includes feedback from the churches. This is an effective process that not only looks at what has been delivered but also considers future delivery of the work and considers the training needs of individual workers going forward.

Workers are well resourced both in terms of travel expenses between locations but also are given the tools, support and an expenses budget to do the job.

Given the growth of Grace, the positive feedback from workers and the churches they have worked with, it can be assumed that the management effectiveness of the project manager is of a high calibre.

Governance

As a limited company and registered charity Grace is regulated through both Companies House and the Charity Commission under the Companies Act and the regulations affecting Charities. Additionally, as an employer and as an organisation that claims gift aid on donations, Grace must submit annual returns to and comply with regulations set by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs.

The regulatory burden placed on Grace demonstrates that they meet some minimum standards of governance; otherwise those regulatory authorities mentioned would take action against Grace.

One of the requirements of the Charity Commission is for a registered charity to have a robust constitution. This describes its core mandate to manage the charity solely for the pursuance of its stated charitable objects. Additionally the process for appointment of board members and meetings is laid out. Therefore stakeholders can remain confident that the resources of the organisation are suitably used to achieve its aims and that there is due process and consideration in its governance at a high level.

The board currently comprises 5 people, including Rachel, and meets 6 times per year, with extra meetings called to support the Grace worker recruitment process. Rachel writes the agenda for board meetings including any items requested by the Trustees.

A common frustration with the founder being employed by the board is the degree of control that the board has over the project director on one hand and ability of the project director to be visionary and radical on the other. By having the governance structures in place (as described above) Grace has created a balance of freedom and accountability.

Grace is currently exempt from audit under the Charities Act and the Companies Act but is required to subject their accounts to independent scrutiny. They have done this and had a satisfactory report from William Poole.

Grace is forward looking in its budgeting process for the following academic year, which is coordinated by the project director and authorised by the board in April for implementation from September. The budget appears to be broad, having 5 years experience in their operations they appear to know what to expect.

Delivery

Effective Child Protection measures are of key importance to Grace's work, primarily to safe guard children in their care but also to maintain their reputation, to be able to continue their ministry. Grace has an effective Child Protection Policy, taking advice and support from Amaze and the Churches Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS). Grace conducts CRB checks (through CCPAS) for all new staff and some schools they work with have required further checks.

The current staff appears very engaged and focussed. Despite being a dispersed group there is a commitment to the common goal of reaching Children with the Gospel and from their reports and appraisals this is clearly a ministry to them, rather than simply a job.

Churches and schools score their Grace workers very highly, the lowest average score being 4.48 out of 5 (discounting 1 extreme deviation of 3.48 awarded to a worker who has since left the organisation).

More detailed feedback from all the churches using Grace is positive, even on the occasion when there was a staff problem (they left due to personal circumstances). This feedback demonstrates tangible delivery of an improvement in children's work in the church. For example, churches have gone from no or very little contact with young people to establishing active mums and toddlers groups, regular family services, messy church and holiday clubs for example. Furthermore when the church has ceased to use Grace many of these activities have been able to continue because of the way the Grace worker has recruited and empowered volunteers from within the church.