



PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE OF SUFFOLK

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REPORT OF THE PROVINCIAL GRAND ALMONER

RW Provincial Grand Master and Brethren. I am pleased to present my report for the year ending 31st December 2020.

I am now seven months into my tenure as Provincial Grand Almoner and what an eventful period it has been. The current COVID pandemic has dominated all our lives and meant that I have had to get up to speed very quickly. I would like to thank my predecessor W. Bro Terry Lewis for his help and support during this period.

Having not been an Almoner before my appointment, it gave me the advantage of having a fresh perspective on the role of the Lodge Almoner and the support structures which are needed to deliver the pastoral care to the Brethren of Suffolk, their families, and dependants. I circulated a feedback questionnaire to all Lodge Almoners, Group Almoners and Visiting Volunteers. This provided some useful thoughts which were incorporated into a new service plan.

The Suffolk Provincial Almoner Service was launched in Autumn 2020 and includes the following themes for the future:

- To Increase awareness of the Provincial Almoner Service and the support available.
- To develop an effective Provincial Almoner team to help deliver the Service.
- To set up a Suffolk Provincial Benevolent Fund for emergency support.
- To continue to provide care & support for Masons, Widows, and their dependants.
- To provide guidance, support, and training to Lodge Almoners.
- To identify and tackle the issues experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- To highlight the facilities provided by RMBI Cornwallis Court.
- To respect the Widows throughout the Province and improve contact.
- To interact with London and the region.

I am fortunate and grateful to have a dedicated and knowledgeable Provincial Group Almoner Team who assist with the delivery of the above. This includes W. Bro Terry Lewis (Deputy PGA), W. Bro Andy Hunt (Group 1), W. Bro Paul Durrant (Group 2), W. Bro Nick Wiseman (Group 3), W. Bro David Cattermole (Group 4), W. Bro Bill Dotesio-Eyers (Group 5 & Very Good Friend lead), W. Bro Jon Neill (Group 6 & Bereavement lead), W. Bro David Hepburn (Group 7), W. Bro Dougie Paine (Group 8, VV & Widows lead), W. Bro Melvyn Eke (Group 9), Mrs Caroline Wales (AST from MCF), W. Bro Tony Wooderson (Mental Wellbeing lead). Their tireless support and guidance have given me the confidence to develop a vision for the Service in the future. I would also like to thank W. Bros Mike Smith, Ian McFetridge, John McMahon & Kenny Hope for their efforts prior to their retirement from the Team.

Progress has been made over the last seven months with the implementation of several initiatives, which include in summary format –

Awareness – Distributed MCF cards, Almoner newsletter, and maintain Almoner database.

Almoner Team & Management – Established team and leads, with regular review meetings and WhatsApp group for team support. Introduced Group Almoners to their Groups.

Suffolk Provincial Benevolent Funds - Fund established after consultation with Provincial Executive.

Care & Support – Initiated enquiries, awards, and support via MCF, State benefits and local Councils. Suggested telephone trees to maintain contact. Contact via “I’m All Right Jack Campaign”. Started the “Very Good Friend” project. Appointed more Visiting Volunteers to process applications & reviews.

Guidance, Support & Training – Held individual Group meetings, published core documents about the role of the Lodge Almoner, Bereavement, Mental Wellbeing. Redesigning the Provincial Website Almoner Page for online document access. Introduced the Commendation of Caring Certificate.

Covid-19 Pandemic – Emergency funding available via the Suffolk Benevolent Fund and the encouragement of Lodge Covid Funds. Support for bereavement and mental wellbeing. Signpost to Counselling careline. Developed relationship with MCF/PGAs in Region 7 to target support.

Cornwallis Court – Regular bulletins with update on Covid-19 management, bed availability and social functions. Established relationship with home manager and “The association of Friends of Cornwallis Court”.

Widows – Appointed Widows lead (Dougie Paine) and project group to increase contact between widows. Initiated widows adoption scheme. Condolence cards sent to all widows from the Province.

London & Region 7 – Established working relationship with AST Caroline Wales. Attend monthly PGA management meetings.

In the nine months up to the end of December 2020, the MCF has processed 34 enquiries, 53 grant awards (including repeat reviews) and delivered £267,000 of support to Suffolk (including RMBI care). We are grateful for this help, which has been generated from our Provincial Festivals.

I am immensely grateful for the help which has been given to all our Brethren in Suffolk, their families, and dependants over the last year. 2021 could be a challenging year as we emerge out of Lockdown, however if we can continue the progress made, I am confident that Freemasonry in Suffolk will be in a better place to deliver Pastoral Care where needed....which is the bedrock of our Ancient and Honourable Institution.

W. Bro Jamie Gwatkin
Provincial Grand Almoner