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**TALAITH SAERYDDOL DE CYMRU**   
**MASONIC PROVINCE OF SOUTH WALES**

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### **Provincial Grand Almoner & Provincial Grand Charity Steward's joint report**

Over the last 12 months, we have had some unprecedented events across our Province, Storm Dennis and the severe flooding in February and the global impact of Coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic in March. All of this has contributed to a significant increase in support work and charitable activity across the whole of the Province.

We would like to personally thank all Lodge and Chapter Almoners, Charity Stewards, Brethren and Companions for the way in which they have gone above and beyond, to plan, coordinate and galvanise effort to assist those who are vulnerable and in immediate need of assistance. Something we are sure we will look back on in years to come and be very proud.

This increase in work and call to action has certainly brought the role of Almoner and Charity Steward at both Provincial and Lodge / Chapter level together and this has only been a positive experience for both the Brethren, Companions and the general public who have benefited from our support.

We have concentrated our efforts on six specific projects.

- Flood Relief
- PPE Visors
- Electronic Communication Tablets
- Telephone Call Conferencing Network
- Square Meals
- Food-bank support

#### **Flood Relief Fund**

Hundreds of residents had their homes damaged by floodwater, with many faced with a wait of months before they could move back in. There has also been considerable damage to businesses and infrastructure.

Storm Dennis brought a month's worth of rain in 48 hours to parts of Wales already badly affected by floods. Police declared a major incident as flooding and landslides caused chaos across the region. Hundreds of homes and businesses have been badly damaged with more than 20,000 properties across the region suffering power cuts during the storm. Freemasons have been asked to assist anyone in distress caused by the floods.

The £30,000 relief fund is jointly financed by the Masonic Charitable Foundation and the Masonic Benevolent Fund of South Wales. We have already distributed grants to those in need and the work continues unabated to help many more individuals and communities.

## **PPE Visors**

The South Wales Freemasons have donated 3,500 vital personal protective equipment (PPE) visors to more than 100 hospitals, GP practices, care homes, hospices, pharmacies, prisons, and schools, for front-line and key workers throughout South Wales.

During this Covid-19 pandemic the procurement of PPE has been a challenge and, at times, costly for many organisations. Organisations who are helping others, and who desperately need to protect their employees in the workplace. The provision of these PPE visors from the freemasons of South Wales has helped over 2,800 workers in such organisations in south Wales.

## **Electronic Communication Tablets**

Research was undertaken with the three Health boards across South Wales to establish a collective view on the use of electronic tablets in hospitals by isolated Covid-19 patients to stay in touch with their families.

The response was immediate and positive. With so many hospital sites, a successful bid for 100 devices was made through the RCG, sourced centrally, distributed locally and equally between the three Health Boards. They have been positively received and are now being used, each tablet proudly displays the masonic symbol. The initiative has been reported in some local press outlets and published in FMT and First Rising (UGLE). Five tablets were also donated to the Albert Edward Prince of Wales Court at Porthcawl where they were gratefully and eagerly received.

One very encouraging aspect of this initiative is that beyond the pandemic the tablets are essential to the creation of digital communities in the NHS whereby patients generally will be able to have visual contact with family and friends who have difficulty visiting and providing patients with general access to the internet.

## **Telephone Call Conferencing Network**

The '161plus69' telephone conference network was set up following the generous donation by Bro. Paul Corcoran of the technology to allow every Lodge and Chapter Almoners to stay in touch with its members during lockdown.

The appeal of the system was that it could accommodate up to 200 participants at any one time, it was restricted to allow privacy of the individual Lodge or Chapter concerned and it did not require an unexpected level of technological expertise to participate particularly for more senior members.

It provided an opportunity for our Petitions Applications Officers to work very closely with Almoners at Masonic centres to advise and support. There are many good examples of the system being used and the supportive contact it has provided.

## **Square Meals**

The Province of South Wales have started a meal delivery service to residents of Cardiff and the south Wales valleys. The initiative, called 'Square Meals', is principally for those who are either classed as 'vulnerable', unable to get to the shops, or those simply finding it difficult to eat a nutritious meal each day. However, the service is open to all.

The Square Meals initiative delivers quality, great-tasting, nutritious meals directly to front doors in a safe and supportive way.

## **Food-bank support**

To provide a specific food parcel delivery on a weekly basis to a cross-section of 10 food banks (both a mixture of official and voluntary food-banks) across our Province, thereby supporting the most vulnerable in our community at a time where movement lock-down is making the regular supply of donated food items hugely difficult for them.

Numerous food banks across some of the most deprived areas are facing a great shortage of supplies to issue, thus depriving those who rely on this as a means of basic survival. The project will support isolated vulnerable people in our community; their immediate families from young children through to the elderly; by ensuring that they receive weekly food parcels.

Warmest fraternal greetings

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