

Province Of South Wales

Report of the Provincial Grand Almoner ending 31st March 2019

Introduction

Following my appointments in the Craft and Holy Royal Arch to Provincial Grand Almoner, I have been incredibly encouraged by the support I have received at every level from the Brethren and Companions, for which I am most grateful.

My first year in office has been challenging and very rewarding and I look forward to continuing in the roles to develop and improve the relationship between myself and the Brethren and Companions which I will come onto later in this report.

The Brethren and Companions continue to receive considerable and essential financial support from the MCF as set out below. The changes in disbursement vary each year and I have included commentary to suggest why that has happened.

Finance

Ending 31/3/18 Beneficiaries 93 Disbursement £282,696

Ending 31/3/19 Beneficiaries 71 Disbursement £219,681

Decrease of £63,015

Reasons – Beneficiaries encouraged to claim statutory benefits; Improvements in personal wealth; Changes in personal circumstances

Family - Education

Ending 31/3/18 Beneficiaries 67 Disbursement £92,640

Ending 31/3/19 Beneficiaries 61 Disbursement £67,995

Decrease of £24,645

Reasons - Children not aspiring to higher education, Includes those reasons above

Health

Ending 31/3/18 Beneficiaries 114 Disbursement £253,821

Ending 31/3/19 Beneficiaries 133 Disbursement £277,775

Increase of £23,954

Reason - Long waiting lists for NHS treatment in Wales

Quicker access to treatment is likely to have assisted the beneficiaries in their return to work and less dependent on financial support from the MCF.

Residential Care

Ending 31/3/18 Disbursement £169,00

Ending 31/3/19 Disbursement £201,613

Increase of £32,673

Currently there are 40 residents in RMBI homes from the Province of South Wales. 25 of those individuals are privately funded while 15 are supported by the RMBI. The AEPoWC at Porthcawl is now running at maximum occupancy which is testimony to the high level of care and facilities at the Home.

Difference in Total Disbursement

Ending 31/3/18 Disbursements £798,157

Ending 31/3/19 Disbursements £767,064

Decrease of £31,093 or 4% on last year which is off-set by the disbursements from our Masonic Benevolent Fund.

Statistics are important but equally so are the human stories behind the data that bring home the reality of the challenges faced by those we help.

'A 92 year old widow with no children and no close relatives who was desperate to maintain her independence and was supported to adapt her bathroom so she could bathe properly and safely.

A Brother whose wife is suffering from progressively worsening Alzheimer's Dementia and had insufficient funds to maintain a reasonable lifestyle, pay the household bills and meet the additional costs of his wife's devastating illness.

A Brother's family with a brain damaged child consequently high on the Autism scale who physically hurts his mother and the Brother with a debilitating long standing injury. They live every day under relentless mental and physical pressure. A devastating set of circumstances yet acutely inspirational.

There is exemplary and skilful work being carried out in our Lodges and Chapters by many Almoners. However, I have noted some inconsistencies in the knowledge level and understanding of what Almoners should do and how they should do it. We owe it to our Brethren, Companions and their dependants to provide consistent, confidential and knowledgeable guidance to access the help they need.

A recent survey among Almoners confirmed those concerns that, in some cases, the selection and role of Almoners are not matched to the well-established criteria set out for the role. In order to help and inform, an Almoner workshop will be held with direct support from the Masonic Charitable Foundation and for the longer term the introduction of Almoner forums across the Province for the exchange of ideas, information and support.

Also I am delighted that a Brother, who faces considerable disability challenges himself, has volunteered to work with the Provincial Almoner's Office to examine how we can improve the experience of disabled Brethren and consequently finding ways of encouraging those who are disabled to have the confidence to join the fraternity.

For the further benefit of the Brethren and Companions, I have recently become a member of the committee of Association of Friends of The AEPoWC at Porthcawl so I can directly represent their interests.

I would like to commend the work of our Petitions Applications Officers and Almoners who work selflessly on our behalf and thank the officers of our Masonic Benevolent Fund for their unstinting and increasing support.

Finally, to you all, I express my admiration for the generous contributions you all make so that those who need it can be helped.