



PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE OF SUFFOLK

Office: Freemasons Hall, Soane Street, Ipswich IP4 2BG – Tel. (01473) 232432

Website: www.suffolkpgl.org.uk Email: pgl@suffolkfreemason.org.uk

Provincial Grand Almoner – Jamie Gwatkin

Bradwell, The Street, Bradfield Combust, Bury St Edmunds IP30 0LP

Tel: 01284 386111 (H) 07976 736393 (M) Email: almoner@suffolkfreemason.org.uk

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 2021.

Freemasonry was quiet in 2021 because of the suspension of meetings and gatherings, however the same cannot be said of the Almoners across the Province and further afield. The demand for help from the Masonic community increased because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and I am tremendously proud of the way which everyone has risen to the challenge.

The Group Almoner Team has engaged with their Lodge Almoners and worked hard with great determination to support them throughout the year. The team has been developed & refined over the period, and we have been joined by W. Bro Roger Cawston (Group 7) and W. Bro Will Austin in a new role as Group Rep Liaison. This latter post should help streamline the dissemination of information and guidance from the Provincial Almoner Team throughout the Province.

The provision of Care & Support has been the primary focus during lockdown. This has been enhanced by the appointment of “Leads” to cover Bereavement, Mental Wellbeing, Widows, and the “Very Good Friend” initiative. This has allowed a speedy response to specific issues which have previously been passed through multiple individuals. General enquiries have been dealt with by the whole Group Almoner team and Visiting Volunteers (VVs). I would like to particularly thank Caroline Wales (AST) for her guidance, support and help with the more complex cases.

Emergency financial aid has also been strengthened by the establishment of the Suffolk Provincial Benevolent Fund. I am very grateful to the PGM and the Provincial Charity Steward for their support in providing the initial funding to get the scheme off the ground. The Fund has provided immediate assistance to emergency cases and been expanded by six donations which has boosted the balance to £19,350 by the year end. There is still some way to go to reach the Fund target of £40,000.

Knowledge transfer has been enhanced by the revamping of the Almoners section on the Provincial Website (<https://www.suffolkpgl.org.uk/support/almoners>). This has now been given “open access” so **anyone** can obtain contact details, guidance, links to other websites and news/events/presentations. This contains most of the general information needed by Almoners...so take a look! The Almoners Conference 2021 was well supported (80% lodges) & received positive feedback.

The MCF provided more support to our families over the calendar year. 85 awards (up from 72) were made totalling £302,000 (up from £276,000) with the RMBSI also giving £129,000 (up from £100,000) for 11 residents in our Care homes.

2022 will continue to be challenging as we emerge out of the pandemic. Therefore, the axis of Mentor/Membership/Almoner must identify **absence and deliver support** where needed. If we ALL get this right, Freemasonry will thrive.

W. Bro Jamie Gwatkin
Provincial Grand Almoner