



February 2024

Your quarterly MCF update

A message from our Chief Executive

Our latest Impact Report published in December shows that in the year 2022-2023, the MCF awarded almost 4,300 grants to individuals or households amounting to £12.8 million; of this, £7.4 million helped with essential daily living costs, £4 million helped with healthcare and wellbeing needs and almost £1.3 million helped children and young people with their education. Within these figures, nearly £300,000 was awarded through 427 grants to support the mental health of Freemasons and their families, a need increasing yearly.

The evidence we gather as part of our Impact and Evaluation framework will enable us to understand how the MCF, working on behalf of Freemasonry, creates positive change in society and within our fraternity. It will also help us to adapt as necessary.

All our grants are intended to improve wellbeing, independence and opportunity. It was therefore reassuring that from the 708 responses to the beneficiary survey conducted during the year, 58 per cent told us that MCF's support had helped with their wellbeing, 24 per cent had improved their independence; others felt our support had enabled access to an opportunity, including gaining control over their finances and being able to cope with more complex situations.

Our support for charities and communities continues to help tackle some of society's biggest challenges. We continue focusing on the needs of children and young people and those experiencing isolation in later life, and last year, we awarded grants to 451 charities working on these issues. These grants amounted to almost £7 million.

In addition, we have continued to work closely with Provinces, and our matched funding grants, festival grants and grants from the Freemasons' Community fund amounted to almost £700,000.

Over the last year, we have been pleased to continue our association with Hospice UK, and grants were awarded to support projects across the country to help people needing end-of-life care, particularly those suffering from the cost of living crisis, including those experiencing homelessness. We also provided 72 bursaries for hospice staff in 51 hospices, and we will see a short video prepared by Hospice UK illustrating the impact of our grants shortly.

None of this work would be possible without the generous support of Freemasons, their families and friends, and since my last update, we have celebrated the Festival finale for the Province of Warwickshire, which raised £2.6 million for the MCF. We are incredibly grateful to this Province and others currently fundraising for the MCF. Over the coming months, we will launch new Festival appeals for the Provinces of Suffolk and Shropshire, and we wish them well in their endeavours.

In December, we held our members' meeting and AGM at Freemasons' Hall; I was delighted by the strong turnout of members and by the active part they played in the meeting. Also, in December, we made our first contributions to the third pillar review, and we look forward to working closely with UGLE to deliver their new strategy. By being fully engaged, we can derive the maximum possible impact from deploying the generous donations of our members, present and past.

Finally, I must acknowledge the wise counsel and guidance of former Chairman Sir Paul Williams and thank him for his support and friendship. I wish him health and happiness in his retirement. I look forward to working closely with his successor, James Long, and wish him well in his new role.

Les Hutchinson
Chief Executive



MAKING A DIFFERENCE



Masonic Support: January marks the one-year point for our children and young people's mental health service; an essential element of the support we provide for the Freemasonry community.



Charity Grants: Through our partnership with the Cranfield Trust, we held a webinar on 16 January for Charity Representatives and Small Grant beneficiary charities so that they could learn more about the partnership and how they can benefit from pro-bono consultancy. We had 56 charities and nine charity representatives sign up for the webinar, which went well. We have incorporated a suggestion of the Charity Grants Committee to increase the income threshold for new participating charities to £1 million from £500,000 per annum.



Fundraising: The Legacy Manager has embarked on a legacy-giving fundraising strategy that will encourage legacy gifts in support of the MCF and promote best practice among members; encouraging those without a will to consider having one written and, more importantly, to remind those with a will in place to make sure they review it. The strategy also promotes and explains good planning for end-of-life care.



RMBI Care Co.: The Charity is scheduled to have over 500 new placements during 2023/24. Around 60 per cent of placements will be self-funders, with the remainder supported by local authority and MCF grant support. We continue to adapt our provision to meet need with increased numbers of dementia placements and continued strong demand for nursing beds. Each of our Homes continues to be well supported by local Freemasons, including the Association of Friends, in support of residents and their families.



Administration: We are reviewing our stationery and catering ordering processes to reduce single-use plastic.



Communications: The 2022/23 Impact Report has been published and is available at mcf.org.uk/impact. The report contains new data and information developed by the Impact and Evaluation team, including analysis of the positive difference our grants make to the people supported by charities in receipt of an MCF grant.



Digital and Technology: We have strategically moved all of our Oracle-based assets (database/applications) to the cloud using Oracle Cloud Infrastructure (OCI). The move to OCI will ensure that the MCF has ownership of the database and access to the latest technologies so that we can better achieve our goals for the benefit of our stakeholders. These steps are fully supported by UGLE.



Finance: We have commenced system design with the new Purchase to Pay provider which will improve budgetary control and oversight of expenditure on external suppliers.



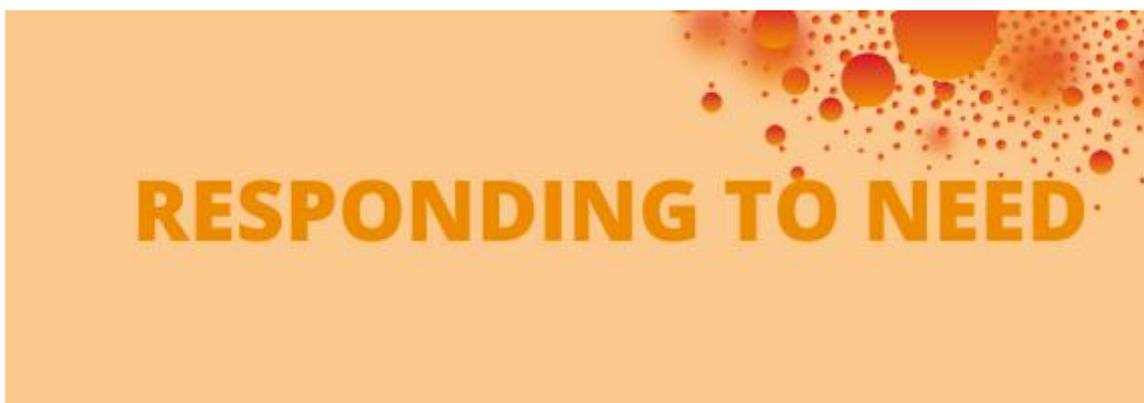
Human Resources: To support staff wellbeing, a '12 days of festive fun' initiative was held during December. The initiative was delivered mainly via the staff intranet, with 548 engagements from MCF and RMBI Care Co Head Office staff. There were also 107 interactions with the competitions, quizzes, puzzles and challenges.



Impact and Evaluation: We are developing a Theory of Change model for Masonic Support and updating the existing model for Charity Grants. Updating these models is a crucial step in enhancing both programmes' effectiveness and ensuring strategic data collection to understand in more detail the positive difference both programmes make.



Relief Chest: Relief Chest holders have made 708 charitable donations totalling £1.7 million from April to December 2023.



Masonic Support: We have improved our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) data for our beneficiaries by broadening our gender definitions to reflect better how our applicants and beneficiaries would identify themselves. This has involved updates to our forms and our GAMES system.



Charity Grants: To date, the new MCF bursary scheme for Hospice staff in England and Wales has awarded 179 MCF bursaries to staff in 85 hospices across 36 Provinces. Hospice UK is inviting applications to the £400,000 MCF grant funding programme for Transitional Care for Young People with Life-Limiting Conditions.



Fundraising: We continue responding to requests for support and information from Provincial Grand Charity Stewards and Festival Chairmen by updating and adding information to the Fundraising Toolkit. The toolkit can be found on the Fundraising Hub, and recent additions to this resource include guidance on supporting vulnerable donors, explaining the difference between 'in aid of' and 'on behalf of' fundraising and providing a template charity stewards report. In addition, the Festival Guidelines have recently been updated to include new information on using the Freemasonry Gives fundraising platform, the benefits of holding a Festival debrief and, more generally, to make the resource more straightforward.



RMBI Care Co: The 10-year RMBI Care Co Modernisation Plan lays out the intent to complete a programme of five care home closures and provision of newly built facilities (not necessarily on the same sites) which meet care standards expectations to take their place. This programme is already well advanced with Prince Philip Duke of Edinburgh Court opened and operational (2022), the closure and demolition of Lord Harris Court (2023), the sale of Ecclesholme (2022), and success with planning approval in early 2024 for the build of a new 64 bedded Care Home at Cornwallis Court, Bury St Edmunds. [Read more about it here.](#)



Administration: We respond to the needs of all MCF departments. Routine tasks include reception duties, post sorting, courier deliveries, room bookings,

meeting room setup, catering requests, stationery orders, and all activities carried out within agreed guidelines. We also support the MCF's initiatives and events, including conferences, Members' meetings and other activities. We have also been working with the Museum of Freemasonry, assisting them with taking forward a significant destruction exercise of the MCF's records.



Communications: A survey has been circulated to users of the MCF's RightMarket design platform. RightMarket provides Provincial stakeholders such as PGAs and PGCSs with online access to MCF branded document templates which can be populated with local information and downloaded for online circulation or local printing. The survey results will help to shape a promotional campaign encouraging greater use of the service and its full range of features.



Digital and Technology: The move to Oracle Cloud Infrastructure (OCI) will help us become even more agile as it offers the opportunity to utilise the latest technologies, techniques, and advances to meet the challenges of an ever-changing digital landscape. Due to the elastic nature of cloud infrastructure, we will be better able to respond to the needs of stakeholders across the MCF and within Freemasonry by adapting our applications whilst maintaining effective service levels.



Finance: We have consolidated all online banking arrangements in Barclays' iPortal, giving users a one-stop solution.



Human Resources: Our Staff Forum representatives gained feedback from their colleagues on improving our communication and engagement across departments. This was given at the last Staff Forum meeting in December, and the SLT

will be reviewing this at their Away Day in February. It was also agreed that the Staff Forum would meet every quarter, and an additional member of SLT would also attend along with the Chief Executive and Group HR Director.



Impact and Evaluation: We are working with the Relief Chest team to develop an impact data capture framework. The Relief Chest team has undertaken data preparation activities. The project's implementation phase is scheduled to commence in the 2024-25 financial year. This crucial stage will focus on enhancing their data capture system, with support from the Digital and Technology team, to gather impact data more effectively.



Relief Chest: Changes have been made to the Relief Chest section on the MCF website to make it more user-friendly and supportive of the full range of Relief Chest services used by fundraisers and donors. The site allows Relief Chest representatives faster access to donation forms and guidance, and enables donors to make online donations more easily.



Masonic Support: We received an excellent report from the internal audit conducted in 2023. The report provided substantial or positive reassurance in seven areas

across the department. Work is being taken forward with the support of the Masonic Support Committee to address points explicitly raised concerning independent living loans from the Victor Donaldson Fund.



Charity Grants: Following an extensive strategic review by the Charity Grants Committee, the targeted funding priorities for our Children and young people and Later Life programmes were launched at the end of January. The priorities in the Children and Young People programme are Early Years, children affected by domestic abuse, and children with Special Educational Needs and disabilities. The priorities for the Later Life programme are people living with Dementia and their Carers. We are working with the Impact and Evaluation team to develop a new Theory of Change model for our main Charity Grants programmes.



Fundraising: We have explored ways to empower donor ‘ambassadors’ for the MCF. One approach is providing them with impact-focussed information that can be easily communicated locally to other Freemasons. To deliver these messages, the MCF lapel pin will be sent with three key facts about the MCF that the donor or supporter can share when talking about the charity in their Lodges. This will help educate the membership and promote the MCF across Freemasonry and the wider community.



RMBI Care Co: The care business continues to retain upper quartile regulatory ratings with every inspection in 2023/24, achieving solid results. Two of our Home Managers, Steve Stace (Shannon Court, Hindhead) and Julie McNeilly (Devonshire Court, Leicester), have won their regional Great British Care Award events for outstanding dementia care management and will represent the RMBI Care Co in the Finals being held in Birmingham on 22 March 2024.



Administration: We are seeking to improve response times and service levels where possible. We also undertake regular health and safety office checks, notifying the Operations Director and UGLE of any safety or compliance issues that need to be addressed and following up on actions to ensure a safe and secure office environment for staff, volunteers and visitors.



Communications: The marketing team have been exploring ways of enhancing support for other departments within the MCF and our stakeholders across Freemasonry. This includes, bringing more graphic design work in-house to reduce time and costs of producing recurring documents such as Festival brochures. We have also attended the recent round of PGA regional meetings to gather feedback and ideas to better support Almoners.



Digital and Technology: The move to Oracle Cloud Infrastructure (OCI) will allow MCF to take advantage of future developments in analytics, business intelligence, machine learning and artificial intelligence. OCI also includes advanced security at every level as well as programs to ensure global, regional and industry compliance. MCF services will always be deployed on Oracle's fastest server which delivers 99.95 per cent uptime.



Finance: We have commenced the rollout of a secure mobile phone banking app to employees who authorise BACS payments, eliminating the problems associated with some desktop browsers in the online banking sector.



Human Resources: In December, the Board reviewed and updated our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Statement, which has been issued to all staff and placed on our website. We concluded 2023 by recognising dates from our EDI calendar including Hanukah, for which an informative staff event was held with a selection of traditional Jewish available. Further information about a range of winter festivals and holidays was made available to all staff, and a “dress your desk” day encouraged the celebration of the various faiths, beliefs, tastes and preferences held by our head office staff. The new EDI Calendar for 2024 has also been designed and issued to encourage further events and awareness sessions, which SLT members and our staff teams will lead. With the RMBI Care Co, we have joint formal accreditation as a Menopause Friendly Employer following the extensive initiatives and support provided to both charities.



Impact and Evaluation: Initiatives to enhance the MCF’s profile as a major grant-maker are ongoing. The MCF delivered a presentation at the Charity Evaluation Working Group about monitoring and evaluation. The insights shared in the presentation were shared on the MCF blog [here](#). In addition, we co-authored a blog sharing the learnings gathered from attending the NPC Ignites conference; read the blog post [here](#). We have also developed a Partnership Framework Toolkit promoting transparent practices which will be published on MCF's website and shared by the Association of Charitable Foundations.



Relief Chest: Relief Chest online services were rolled out to all Relief Chest holders during April-June 2023. By the end of November, around 40 per cent had registered to use the service. An initiative to encourage greater use of Relief Chest Online services was completed in December 2023, and as a result, 197 new users have been registered to use the service.





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