

# Better Lives



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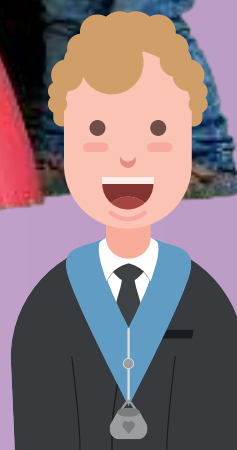
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For freemasons, for families, for everyone  
[www.mcf.org.uk](http://www.mcf.org.uk)



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**Guest welcome**

**“ It is a common misconception that only older people are at risk of loneliness; in fact, loneliness and social exclusion can affect people of all ages and from all walks of life.**

As a member of the MCF's Advice & Support Team, I come into contact with lots of different people who have become isolated as a result of health problems, family responsibilities or financial difficulties, as well as age. Some are single parents or full-time carers, others have been made redundant or may be struggling with limited mobility. By making sure the people we assist have access to the right support, we can give them greater freedom and the opportunity to participate more actively in society.

Throughout this issue of *Better Lives*, we'll be exploring the topic of social inclusion and how the MCF is helping people of all ages to overcome their isolation and get out and about. Read on to find out how our seasonal grants have helped low-income families to enjoy days out together and how we are working in partnership with 13 Age UK branches across the country to help combat loneliness in later life.

When people approach us for support it is not always obvious that they are feeling lonely or isolated. By sitting down and having a chat about what's going on in someone's life, we can often gain a better understanding of what their true needs are and signpost them to other specialist organisations.

If you are struggling financially, physically or emotionally, don't hesitate to get in touch – you never know where the conversation could lead!

**Maggie Holloway**  
*Advice and Support Manager*







# Revealed: Inside an almoner's bag

*Whether it's a briefcase or a rucksack, a tote bag or a zip folder, an almoner is never without his bag when he's out and about visiting members of his lodge. Peek inside and the contents will give you a glimpse of what it really means to be an almoner.*

Ray, 55, lives in Essex and has been an almoner for two lodges for the last eight years. We spoke to Ray to find out how he defines his almoner role, what support he can provide to the masonic community, and most importantly, what's inside his bag...

**So Ray, what does the role of an almoner mean to you?**

"I absolutely love being an almoner! When I'm chatting to people outside of freemasonry, I describe the role as a welfare officer."

**What support can you provide for the masonic community?**

"Essentially, we are the first point of contact for lodge members and their families for any type of assistance. You've got to be someone that people know they can turn to if they need support. We try and give people the encouragement, confidence and care they need to work through whatever situation they're in, and I also make sure I keep in touch with the partners of brethren directly, so they know they can call me at any time."

**So Ray...**

**what's in your almoner bag?**

## Are you an almoner?

Visit our *dedicated almoner resources page* where you can find plenty of tools such as videos, handbooks and factsheets to help you in your role! Visit:



[www.mcf.org.uk/almoner](http://www.mcf.org.uk/almoner)





# In the spotlight: Loneliness in later life



*Loneliness in later life is on the rise, with millions of older people reporting that they feel ignored or invisible. In fact, there are over 200,000 older people in the UK who haven't spoken to anybody in the past month.*

As the UK's leading charity supporting the wellbeing of older people, Age UK has the expertise required to tackle this important issue. With this in mind, we recently launched a partnership with 13 local Age UK branches across England and Wales to deliver individually tailored support to older people going through

major life transitions. The programme will improve wellbeing, increase independence, and reduce loneliness.

We spoke to Pam Creaven, Services Director at Age UK, to find out more about loneliness in later life and what we can do to combat it.

## **How widespread is loneliness amongst older people in the UK?**

Figures suggest there are currently 3.6 million older people living alone in the UK, with 1.4 million of them feeling ignored by others and cut off from society.

It is predicted that by 2066 there will be more than 20 million people over 65; with an aging population and an underfunded social care system that will struggle to cope, the number of lonely people and the complexity of their needs is likely to increase.

## **Why is loneliness such a problem amongst older people?**

Studies have identified a number of factors associated with being lonely in older age, including a lack of social networks and health problems.

Many older people live alone, possibly because they're widowed or live far away from

their families. Others simply have limited opportunities to socialise. As people get older, their health tends to decline, which can reduce their ability to leave the house and maintain relationships.

## **What effect can loneliness have on a person's health?**

Chronic loneliness is associated with a number of health conditions including depression, psychological stress, and an increased risk of developing dementia.

Our research has also shown that social isolation is a stress that suppresses the immune cells involved in killing viruses and bacteria.

## **What can we do as individuals to help ease the issue of loneliness?**

Age UK believes that 'no one should have no one to turn to', so first and foremost it's important that people are made to feel that they are not alone.



*If you have an older friend or relative, keep in contact with them, particularly if they live further away. You can also look out for older neighbours by popping in for a cup of tea, or giving them a hand with their shopping."*

Alternatively, you could volunteer to work at your local Age UK, where coffee mornings and other events provide important opportunities for socialising and activities.

*Watch our new video which features Bill, an 88-year-old freemason and veteran, who shares his experiences of loneliness since his wife, Nancy, passed away.*

 [www.mcf.org.uk/impact-later-life](http://www.mcf.org.uk/impact-later-life)

# Insider story



## Daventry Area Community Transport

*Inspired by the many stories of freemasons volunteering their time with local charities, we've created a brand new video series called **Helping Hands!** Each episode follows a freemason as they spend a day volunteering with a charity that has benefitted from an MCF grant, to find out more about their important work and highlight the impact of masonic funding on the wider community.*

Our most recent episode sees Northamptonshire & Huntingdonshire freemason, Bob, visit Daventry Area Community Transport (DACT). Bob volunteered for 15 years at DACT, and returned for the day on their dial-a-ride service, which aims to tackle loneliness and social isolation in the elderly community.

Our Marketing Executive, Freya, went along for the ride too and shares their experience...

**5:00am**

My alarm goes off and I'm careful not to hit the snooze button; it's a long way from Kent to Northamptonshire! I grab a cup of tea from a café then catch a train to London.

**7:00am**

I arrive at London Euston and have about half an hour until my train to Daventry. It's going to be a long day so I treat myself to some eggs on toast, board the next train and fall back asleep for the journey.

**8:30am**

Our videographer, Gary, is there to meet me when I arrive;

*"Why do you book shoots so early!"* he says with a laugh.

We hop in his van and make the short drive to DACT's head office. DACT were awarded £15,000 by Northamptonshire & Huntingdonshire freemasons in last year's MCF Community Awards and the money went towards a new bus for their dial-a-ride service – it's exciting to see the new bus sat in the car park, ready for a day of volunteering!

Watch Bob's day out with DACT in our latest episode of **Helping Hands** now!

🌐 [www.mcf.org.uk/DACT](http://www.mcf.org.uk/DACT)

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# Seasons of fun



*Enjoying the school holidays and time as a family should not be limited by financial circumstances; whether it's the summer holidays or festive break, time out of education allows families to create memories that will last a lifetime.*

Unfortunately for some families from low-income backgrounds, spending money on activities and trips just isn't an option. To help ease the pressure, we provide a small grant for the children we support with daily living expense grants who are considered to have a greater financial need than most.

Seasonal grants can be used for anything! Days out, Christmas presents, fun activities – it's completely up to the family how they would like to use the money. Here are just a few of the day trips and adventures that families have enjoyed this summer, thanks to our support:

"I would like to thank the MCF for providing us with a summer holiday grant for Megan and Amy."

We were able to visit Portmerion Village and King Arthur's Labyrinth – they both had a great time and without the assistance of the grant, it wouldn't have been possible!"

**Andrew, father to Megan, 18, and Amy, 11**



**“** Theo and Matilda have had a great summer. We could visit theme parks and adventure activities with the generous help of their summer grant.”

**Jan, mother to Theo, 12, and Matilda, 9**



To find out more about our daily living expenses grants, get in touch:

 [www.mcf.org.uk](http://www.mcf.org.uk)

 0800 035 60 90

 [help@mcf.org.uk](mailto:help@mcf.org.uk)

# Four ways you can play your part...



**No one should feel lonely but unfortunately, loneliness and social isolation affects over 1.4 million people every day.**

There are many organisations across England and Wales that can support those who are feeling lonely or socially isolated, however, sometimes the most simple and effective way of getting back into the community is through the support of family and friends. Here are four top tips on how you can tackle social isolation, and help others get back out and about...



## **Invite someone for tea**

It sounds so simple, but many people can go for days, if not weeks, without having a conversation with another person. Inviting someone for tea or coffee is small gesture that can make a big difference to a person's wellbeing.



## **Give someone a call**

Do you have an hour each week? Give someone who you think may be feeling lonely a call. Whether you just catch up about your day or ask them how they're feeling, making an effort to get in touch can help people feel less alone.



## **Ask someone how they're feeling**

If we know someone is feeling low or depressed, sometimes we avoid asking them how they are for fear of upsetting them. Don't be afraid! By asking someone how they feel, you're providing them with an opportunity to open up. This may help them to understand why they feel lonely, and work out some next steps to combat their isolation.



## **Put them in touch with the MCF**

We offer a variety of support to people who are feeling lonely or socially isolated. Our counselling careline is a free and confidential service that can support members of the masonic community through a difficult time. Alternatively, our enquiries team can signpost people to the best local and national services that aim to help people who may be feeling lonely.

**The masonic community is already helping people to get out and about!**



Get in touch with the MCF and our counselling careline service today:

 [www.mcf.org.uk](http://www.mcf.org.uk)  
 0800 035 60 90  
 [help@mcf.org.uk](mailto:help@mcf.org.uk)

## **A spot of lunch**

Vic, 78, is a Visiting Volunteer from East Kent, who has run regular fine dining lunches for widows and socially isolated freemasons for the last four years.

"I realised that there wasn't much intermingling with ladies from different lodges, so I wanted to bring them together. When their husbands or partners were alive, they would attend events together, but once they were widowed, all of that stopped. The lunches have been very successful and we usually get around 40 to 50 people attending. It means people can socialise and it makes a big difference to them!"

# Ask the almoner

Our resident almoner answers your questions about the support we provide.

**My partner has moved into a residential care home and I'm struggling to afford the costs of visiting them. Can the MCF help fund my travel expenses?**

**Yes** – it is possible that the MCF can consider a grant towards travel costs to and from a care home or hospital. Call our enquiries line on 0800 035 60 90.

**I am feeling lonely. Does the MCF run any befriending services?**

**Not directly** – but the MCF can liaise with the local masonic community to help you meet new people. In addition, our Advice & Support Team have a wealth of knowledge about organisations in your local area that can support people in similar situations, and would be happy to discuss these with you.

**I have mobility issues which make it difficult to leave the house. Can the MCF help?**

**Yes** – the MCF can consider grants for ramps, rails or stairlifts to make it easier to move around your home as well as grants for powered wheelchairs or mobility scooters to help you get about outside.

Send your questions for the Better Lives almoner to  
@ help@mcf.org.uk



# You've spoken!

This summer, we conducted a survey of people who have been supported by the MCF for the first time. We asked for feedback on their experience, the support they received and the impact that our grants have had.

We are thrilled to report that the majority of people we have supported were happy with the service they received:



**93%**

felt the process of applying for support was a positive experience.



**97%**

felt that the MCF staff's knowledge and professionalism either met or exceeded their expectations.



**93%**

felt that the response time to their enquiry met or exceeded their expectations.



**96%**

were satisfied with the size of their grant.

## Reader feedback

In the last issue of *Better Lives* we shared an article about Ronnie, and his battle with addiction and homelessness. Many people connected with his story and we were touched by some of the responses we received.

**Steve\***, via email

"I have just read Ronnie's story in the last issue of *Better Lives*. I am a freemason and I was also homeless while I was in the chair. I thought I was the only one. I've assisted Shelter a lot in the last six months. Please pass my best to Ronnie, it does get better!"

**Joe**, via Facebook

"Alcoholism is one of the top killers in our country. I have been secretary of our local AA for many years and have seen many people die from booze. The upside is I see many people making a new life for themselves. Well done MCF for publishing this post on a subject that is still regarded as taboo."

We love hearing your feedback so we can make *Better Lives* as helpful and interesting as possible. If you have any comments, feedback or suggestions, please email: [communications@mcf.org.uk](mailto:communications@mcf.org.uk) or tweet: [@Masonic\\_Charity](https://twitter.com/Masonic_Charity)

\*Name changed to protect identity.





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Name .....

Email .....

Full Address .....

Postcode .....

I am a

- ☐ Freemason ☐ Interested person  
☐ Family member ☐ Charity representative

If you are a freemason, please tell us the name of your province and indicate whether you are one of the following:

Province .....

- ☐ Worshipful Master ☐ Secretary  
☐ Almoner ☐ Charity steward  
☐ None of the above

Please return this form to:

Masonic Charitable Foundation  
60 Great Queen Street, London WC2B 5AZ

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It's easy to take the small things in life for granted such as visiting a loved one or sitting comfortably whilst watching the news. For people, these everyday things are a luxury. The MCF helps people who were previously missing out on simple pleasures due to poor health or financial worries.

Now I can...



Visit my husband in hospital

Since January, we've helped 100 people to visit their loved ones in hospital or care homes without having to cover their travel expenses.



Have a cup of tea with my neighbour

We've also helped 27 people adapt their homes with rails and ramps, making it easier to get in and out of the house.



Pop out to the shops whenever I like

We've given 45 people more freedom by funding the costs of a mobility scooter or wheelchair.



Spend time with my family in the evenings

We've helped 21 people to relax more comfortably and safely in their homes by funding the costs of a rise and recline chair.



Sleep in my own bed again

We have made it easier for 32 people to get around their homes by funding the costs of a stairlift.



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