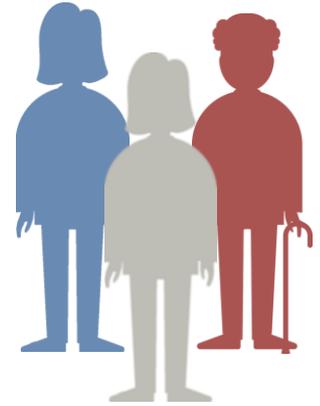


Surrey Masonic Widows' Association

Background

The Surrey Masonic Widows' Association exists with the purpose of tackling loneliness and social isolation in Surrey by offering friendship, companionship and hosting regular meet ups for all of its members.



"After my husband passed away I began to feel isolated. After joining the local widows group and attending my first meeting, it was like a new door had opened in my life and I no longer feel the way I did."

Through joining a Surrey widows group members will benefit from:

- A relaxed, informal and comfortable atmosphere
- A renewed sense of belonging and community
- Reduced feelings of loneliness and isolation
- An improved sense of well being
- Reasonably priced and informal lunches with new friends and members
- Regular guest speakers and outings organised several times a year including a pub lunch or afternoon tea.

The issues faced

There are approximately 1.2m chronically lonely older people in the UK today, and probably a considerable number of Freemasons and their widows are included in this figure. For bereaved partners it can be a struggle to carry on and begin to build a new life, and often friendships can fall away and family members forget to visit. Before they know it they have not spoken to anybody for six weeks and they begin to feel beset by feelings of loneliness and social isolation. If ignored, these feelings have potential to spiral into complex health and well-being issues.

It is important to bring members of the masonic community together; to remind those who are lonely or isolated that they have not been forgotten and to show them that there are like minded individuals in similar circumstance who are ready to take an interest in their life and wellbeing.

The action taken to address the issues

The Province of Surrey was able to recognise that action needed to be taken to address the issues, and understood that the introduction of a Widows Association could positively encourage people to reconnect with others and to participate in community activities. The MCF asked Mrs Margarette Donaldson, Chair of the Surrey Masonic Widows' Association, to explain in more detail about the action taken in her Province to address the issues faced.

How did the idea of establishing a widows' association come about and how does it function?

The idea of setting up the Surrey Masonic Widows' Association came from a Past Provincial Grand Master (PPGM). He asked that all lodge almoners be contacted and asked to supply the contact details of their widows to the Provincial Grand Secretary. He then arranged to send out invitations on the PPGM's behalf inviting them to attend the first meeting.

At the first meeting one of the challenges was to establish a committee of volunteers, assign roles and responsibilities, and agree how often to meet. We found that it was necessary to meet bi-monthly during the early stages. Our committee was used to oversee the work of the association such as setting meeting dates, agreeing agendas and booking venues, and included a Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer. Additional support was sought from other members to assist with organising the annual programme of meetings and events. We found it helpful to hold an Annual General Meeting (AGM) for electing committee members.

What was one of the first key decisions to be taken?

One of the first decisions which needed to be taken was in relation to the annual membership subscription fee and the setting up of a bank account into which subscription fees are paid. The membership fee agreed for the Surbiton Branch of the Surrey Masonic Widows' Association is £10 a year which is used to fund any catering and venue costs.

How did you promote the service?

Once the above was all in place it was essential to consider how we promoted the service and reach the people we wanted to reach. An effective publicity campaign would help us do this. We arranged for various leaflets and posters to be created and printed along with some pop up banner stands which were then displayed in lodges and local masonic centres. The leaflets were particularly helpful to almoners because they could use them to promote the service directly to their widows, even handing over a copy with any greetings cards or contact he would make. We also decided to update the Provincial website with information about the association and its groups.

Do you have any tips for somebody wishing to set up a widows' service?

We organise regular excursions for our members. The Surbiton Branch of the Surrey Masonic Widows' Association gratefully received financial support from the local Lodge through funds raised by Brethren. This enabled us to provide subsidised travel for the excursions without further cost to our members.

Some newer members naturally feel shy or overwhelmed when attending their first meeting with us. One approach we use to help alleviate these feelings is assigning a friend or 'buddy' who can help to put individuals at ease and can introduce them to others.

It was essential that we had an effective record keeping system of all individual members to help with mailings and other promotional activities, such as newsletters and upcoming meetings or events. We find using a simple Excel spreadsheet to be the most effective way of managing our list of members.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

The Surbiton branch of the Surrey Masonic Widows' Association has been successfully operating since 1999 and continues to welcome new members and change lives!

"I have never looked back since joining my local widows group. I've made so many new friends and I feel like part of the community again."

Find out more

Interested in knowing more about some of the services that support isolated and lonely people? The following list is a small selection of those which operate around the country.

The MCF does not endorse or recommend any of the organisations listed.

- **Age UK: Call in Time**

Free weekly friendship calls for the over 60s.

www.ageuk.org.uk/services/befriending-services/

- **Contact the Elderly**

Monthly tea parties for socially isolated people aged 75 or over.

0800 716543

<https://www.contact-the-elderly.org.uk/>

- **Independent Age: Friendship Services**

Free phone calls and home visits for older people.

0800 319 6789

<https://www.independentage.org/get-support/receive-regular-phone-calls-or-visits>

- **Royal Voluntary Service**
Practical help, companionship, advice and support.
0845 608 0122
<https://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/get-help>
- **Silverline**
A free, confidential service providing information, advice and friendship calls for older people.
0800 470 80 90
<https://www.thesilverline.org.uk/>
- **UK Men's sheds Association**
Men's Sheds are befriending groups across the UK which help to reduce isolation and loneliness, benefiting men's health and wellbeing.
<https://menssheds.org.uk/find-a-shed/>

General information on loneliness

- **Campaign to end loneliness**
<https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/>

Other information

You may also be interested in the following Masonic Charitable Foundation resources.

- **Alternative Sources of Support Factsheet**
Contact details for a selection of national charities and organisations providing support and assistance to individuals and families. mcf.org.uk/almoner/
- **Advice, Counselling and Support leaflet**
A leaflet explaining the practical support and assistance the Masonic Charitable Foundation can provide to Freemasons and their families. mcf.org.uk/resources/
- **Loneliness Factsheet**
A short guide explaining the impacts of loneliness and outlining potential sources of assistance. mcf.org.uk/almoner/
- **Bereavement Factsheet**
A short guide through some of the practical implications following the death of a loved one. mcf.org.uk/almoner/

The Masonic Charitable Foundation would like to express its sincere thanks to Mrs Margarett Donaldson, Chair of the Surrey Masonic Widows' Association, for her kind assistance in creating this case study.

SAMPLE INVITATION & PROGRAMME

SURREY MASONIC WIDOWS ASSOCIATION

SURBITON BRANCH

Wednesday 28th March 2018

TEARS OF THE DRAGON

'ALL ABOUT PEARLS' BY FRANCES BENTON

11.00 Arrival and refreshments

11.30 Frances Benton (guest speaker) plus opportunity to purchase pearl jewellery

12.30 Bar opens

1.00 Lunch

To book please complete and return the slip below together with your cheque for £ (organiser to insert) payable to (organiser to insert) **by 19th March 2019** to:

(Organiser to insert preferred name and address)

Regrettably bookings cannot be taken nor can refunds be made after 19th March 2018

Donations for the raffle would be welcome.

Detach slip below

I wish to book lunch and enclose my cheque for £ (organiser to insert) payable to (organiser to insert)

Name:

Telephone no:

(Please do not staple your cheque to this slip or cut it smaller)