



A Little TLC

The Freemasons in Somerset, along with many other Freemasons throughout the country, are donating teddy bears to the accident and emergency departments of local hospitals. The scheme, known as the TLC Appeal, started in Essex as part of the Freemasonry in the community initiative in 2002 and has since spread to about two-thirds of the country. It is funded by local Freemasons' Lodges and in Weston-super-Mare it is also supported by the local Masonic Widows' Association.

The teddies are given to children when they are brought into the hospital and as a bonus they get to keep them when they are discharged. Sick and injured children are often anxious and distressed when they arrive at a hospital's A&E department, and medical staff report that the teddy bears help calm the children and are enormously helpful. The doctors and nurses can also use the teddies to show injured youngsters what is happening to them, which helps to reassure the child (and often the parent) simply and easily.

Here in Somerset, it was piloted in Weston-super-Mare and has since spread to hospitals in Minehead, Yeovil, Taunton and Clevedon, with others to follow. Plans are also under way for supplying teddies to the new children's hospice at Wraxall in North Somerset. Each hospital has its own local contact (or 'teddy bear man') to ensure that a constant supply of teddies is on hand. To date 4,500 teddies have been given to hospitalised children in Somerset.

The scheme is even spreading to the continent. A German Freemason, whose mother lives in Burnham-on-Sea, was so taken by the project that when he returned to Germany, he collected more than £2,000 for the Somerset scheme and will be starting a similar scheme in Germany.

Freemasonry is one of the world's oldest secular fraternal societies and the practice of charitable works is

central to its ethos, not only for other Freemasons, but also for the community as a whole. This is usually expressed by financial donations to charities and local organisations and by voluntary efforts as individuals.

Every Freemason in England and Wales contributes to the Grand Charity, which supports non-Masonic charities each year with grants amounting to several million pounds. The Grand Charity is invariably the first to step in to support the British Red Cross when natural disasters occur. Each year, every hospice receives a grant, the total amounting to around £500,000. This year, the Grand Charity has made a grant of £25,000 to the National Blind Children's Society based in Highbridge, which will help fund ICT and sensory equipment for visually impaired children. Stoke-sub-Hamdon-based Worldwide Volunteering for Young People has also received a £2,000 boost to their funds. The WWV maintains a database that enables volunteers to match their wishes to the requirements of volunteer organisations.

Somerset is one of 47 Masonic Provinces in England and Wales, each one contributing to its own charities. Masonic Lodges have been meeting in Somerset since 1733; the first recorded one – the Royal Cumberland – being formed in Bath. The newest Lodge – Sir Isaac Newton Lodge – was formed this year and meets in Nailsea. Today, nearly 5,000 members belonging to 88 Lodges meet in 27 Somerset towns and cities. They each contribute significant financial support to local charities and organisations. This support ranges through a whole spectrum of charities from Age Concern and Alzheimer's Research, the British Institute for Brain Injured Children and the Yeovil Heartbeat Cardiac Rehabilitation, to IT for the Terrified and West Somerset Talking News. □

For more information call ☎01934 713115 or visit www.pglsomerset.org.uk, or write to the Provincial office at the Masonic Hall, Church Street, Wedmore, BS28 4AB.

Lifeline

Freemason Peter Elmont describes how teddies are brightening up hospital visits for children

Above Lyn Vellacott (Weston General Hospital), eight-year-old Abigail Chilcott, David Jenkins (Provincial Grand Master of Somerset) and Peter Elmont

PHOTO: PAT MORRISSEY