

## *Annual Welfare Review 2021*

### **MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT, HMA MARTIN SHEARMAN**

I wrote in the last annual review that we were seven weeks into lockdown. That seemed then a long time to live with restrictions. Twelve months on, the toll extorted by Coronavirus has been heavy.

An accelerating vaccination campaign now holds out hope of better times ahead, in Belgium as in the UK though sadly not yet in many parts of the world.

But come what may, living through the last year has shown us how much kindness, selflessness and concern for others matter. The British Charitable Fund embodies those virtues. Thank you for all you do.

### **WHOM DO WE HELP**

People come to the British Charitable Fund in times of personal crisis. Since 1815, the Fund has been helping British people and their dependants who find themselves in difficulties whilst in Belgium. The people we help are young and old, long-term residents in Belgium and new arrivals, some just passing through, and come from all walks of life. The BCF is non-denominational and non-judgemental, and simply does what it takes to help get lives back on track. Many people come to the BCF because of personal contacts, so please spread the word by making friends and family aware of the work the BCF does.

The problems people encounter are many and varied and can turn lives upside down. For instance, coping with administrative requirements upon the loss of a spouse can often be daunting, and loneliness and isolation (often coupled with poverty) can be longer-term problems for many people, not necessarily the elderly. Language barriers only add to the difficulties and anxieties experienced by many people, often the most vulnerable amongst us. The following are some examples of the kind of work we do and the wide variety of people we help. Names have been changed to protect identities.

#### **Elizabeth's Story**

Elizabeth is a lady of a certain age. She has seen a lot of life but doesn't go out much these days. She is very pleased to receive the visit of a BCF volunteer every week or so – just to catch up on things and have a chat.

#### **Jack and Jill's Stories**

For many years, the BCF has been happy to support Jack and Jill with a monthly amount which helps to alleviate the stress of trying to make ends meet on a minimum income. Old age and illness are just two of the ways that make it impossible for some people to ensure that they have enough income to cover the entirety of their outgoings. A small, guaranteed supplement to monthly income makes life very much less stressful for people who already have a lot to deal with and allows them to make the most of their days.

#### **Emily's Story**

Emily has lived in Brussels for most of her adult life. Now, well into her retirement, she urgently needs to find somewhere new to live. The task of trying to find another apartment, in Brussels, using the internet, is completely overwhelming. Emily was extremely anxious about the whole process. The BCF stepped in to help her in her search. A new home was located, the BCF helped to facilitate the financial arrangements and one of our volunteers helped Emily physically move.

### **Silvia's Story**

Silvia was referred to the BCF for assistance because she needed financial assistance. It quickly became apparent that her case was extremely complex, requiring the intervention of other authorities to try to get her life back on track. In the short term, the Fund was able to help but, eventually, privacy laws meant that there was nothing further that could be done and so the BCF stepped back, awaiting further news and remaining ready to help Silvia again in the future, if necessary.

### **The Chatterton Family Story**

The Chatterton family had suffered the loss of their father in 2019 and their mother was diagnosed with terminal cancer in 2021. The family were unable to escape the ever increasing financial burden of the situation and so asked the BCF for assistance. Outstanding invoices were paid and assistance given to find suitable legal assistance upon the death of Mrs Chatterton. A strain of a very difficult time for the family was alleviated to some degree by the removal of part of the burden, the part that could easily be resolved.

### **The Long-term Support Story**

The Brussels terrorist attacks of 22 March 2016 left several British citizens as victims. At the time, the BCF mobilised help very quickly - in conjunction with the British Embassy, Consulate and UK Police - and still today provides much needed logistical and moral support to the British people who were injured or lost a spouse at the time.

## **HOW WE HELP**

As our case stories demonstrate, there is no limit to the type of help the British Charitable Fund can provide - from having a weekly meeting over a cup of tea to providing significant long-term financial support. The BCF works as a committee and is a group of unpaid volunteers. We work in conditions of the strictest confidentiality but are an 'agency of last resort' and only step in when applicants have exhausted the normal means of support from family or government sources. Our structure enables us to react very quickly (often the same day) and support can last for as little as a few days, or continue for many years.

## **CONNECTING WITH OTHER BRITISH ORGANISATIONS**

We are concerned that there may be many needy people who are simply not aware of the help we can offer. The BCF is devoted to increasing awareness of its activities amongst the British community in Belgium and we continue to explore possibilities for extending contact within the community.

Part of the effectiveness of the BCF is that we work closely with other organisations which also help British nationals in Belgium. Many of our beneficiaries come to us via organisations such as the Royal British Legion (RBL), the Community Help Service (CHS), the Anglican churches, and the Wednesday Club.

We liaise regularly with the Consulate and the British Embassy who, when their powers to intervene are limited, have referred a number of cases to the BCF. We are very happy that we are able to work so well

together to the benefit of those who need help.



**CHS**



## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN, JULIE HUCKLE

Following the upheaval that we all endured during 2020 as a result of the Covid pandemic, 2021 was a year of trying to re-establish a normal life, albeit a 'new normal'. The effects of the corona virus on the lifestyles and livelihoods of the vast majority of the global population have resulted in a change in people's perspectives. I would like to think that the days of die hard individualism are slowly on their way out, to be ultimately replaced by a more generalised sense of collectivism where 'communication', 'group loyalty', 'compromise' and 'families and communities' become the new buzz words.

The act of bringing people together through a common cause helps to create a sense of community and encourages the growth of a network where everyone looks out for everyone else. The concept of a traditional nuclear family with very close emotional and geographical ties can no longer be taken for granted. In an age where families can be separated by several hundreds of kilometres or where disagreements mean that communications between family members are fraught (or even non-existent) there is a real risk of social isolation. If these factors are compounded by advancing age and/or poor health, we have to allow for the possibility that there are a lot of people in society who feel very alone in the face of the challenges of day-to-day living.

From its inception in 1815, the British Charitable Fund has always been about caring, loyalty and families and communities. Its first stated objective was "the relief of the indigent British population left in Brussels at the close of the Waterloo campaign and after the withdrawal of the British Army". Whilst those specific terms do not so much apply in 2021, the resolution adopted by the BCF in May 1817 "that the British Charitable Fund ... be appropriated ..... to the Distressed and Deserving subjects of the United Kingdom by affording them temporary Assistance, dispensing Medicines, or enabling them to return to the Native Country " is still very much a guiding principle.

The coronavirus has affected all of our lives to one degree or another but I am proud to say that BCF volunteers have continued to act and make a difference to people's lives. Whilst the tenacity and consistency of that my BCF colleagues showed towards BCF Beneficiaries in 2020 was maintained in 2021, it has become apparent that we have a real need for even more willing volunteers, men and women who are prepared to set aside a few hours in their busy week to (for example) have tea with someone whose only 'need' is a friendly face to talk to, or to help someone with the tedious but stressful situation of having to move house at the age of 75. We all know what a good neighbour is – we all hope to have one – BCF volunteers try to be just that, but we need more "kind neighbours" to swell our numbers.

BCF work basically relies on two major resources. The first is time, which our **volunteers** bring in quantity. New volunteers are always welcome and, should you have a little time to spare, please do join us. You can contact us via our web-site [www.bcfund.be](http://www.bcfund.be) Our second primary resource is money, which you, our generous supporters, continue to provide. I know that the Beneficiaries of our resources, and their families, are extremely grateful.

Thank you!

## DONORS AND SUPPORTERS IN 2021 – € 13.910 – WITH VERY MANY THANKS TO ALL

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and one anonymous donor

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If you don't have time to help us, please consider making a donation. As a registered Belgian charity all donations over 40 euros are tax deductible. You can make a bank transfer to our account **British Charitable Fund – IBAN BE37 3101 8900 8428**, with the message 'Donation'. Please leave us your address/email details so that we can stay in touch. Thank you!

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