



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE COVID-19 OLDER SEAFARERS & FAMILIES WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 OSFWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON THURSDAY 26TH MARCH 2020

PRESENT: Mr P Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
Capt A Cassels (AC)	MNWB
V Coleman (VC)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
Mr M Cowley (MC)	Seafarers' Advice & Information Line (SAIL)
Cdre D Dickens (DD)	Fishermen's Mission (FM)
Cdr Charles Heron Watson (CHW)	Royal MN Education Foundation (RMNEF)
Mr G Hockley (GH)	Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
Mr M Howarth (MH)	Nautilus Welfare Fund (NWF)
Mr Ken McLean (KM)	IMarEst Guild of Benevolence (IMarEst)
Miss Victoria Muir (VM)	Trinity House (TH)
Capt J Osmond (JO)	Shipwrecked Mariners' Society (SMS)
Mrs Christine Rankin (CR)	The Watch Ashore (WA)
Mrs C Spencer (CS)	Seafarers UK (SfUK)
Mrs D Thomas (DT)	Sailors' Children's Society (SCS)
Ms L Wilson (LW)	Seafarers' Hospital Society (SHS)

The meeting opened at 11.00am. The Chairman explained that the purpose of the group was to share problems, experiences, best practice and avoid unnecessary duplication during the COVID-19 crisis. There would be no reporting of apologies as membership was voluntary during the crisis. Members provided updates on their respective organisations as follows:

SAIL, MC – Sharp increase in number of calls as expected, especially this week, mostly from working age group and mostly fishermen. SAIL well positioned for phone/email advice, which is changing daily as Govt. response evolves. Initial advice offered is relatively straightforward. In 3-6 months, rent/mortgage holidays will come to an end. Debt caseworker advice almost stopped for the moment. Storing up problems for 3, 6 or 9 months' time when real work will start.

SCS, DT – Entire team homeworking. Working on team morale as taking lots of distressing calls. Team video calls every day, 365 TeamViewer chats and actively encouraging Joe Wicks workouts. Frontline response to families, have bought 65 home computers from PC World in 4 days, although there are supply issues. On Monday, introduced £10 per week per child additional grant for food and heating for families living in poverty. Defining vulnerability as safeguarding where there are child protection/child in need plans in place and mental health concerns with parents. Also families with mental health, autism or ADHD living in flats with no outside space. Speaking to these families on weekly basis via video messaging, phone calls, text or Facebook. Please see SCS Facebook page for activities promoted to see how families are supporting each other at this time. Seen influx for small scheme providing fishermen or MN (they must have children to be eligible) who can't go to sea with 3 payments of £200 over 3 months. FM referring cases to SCS. Providing grants to fishermen who can't sell their fish, particularly lobster atm. Received supportive letter from HRH Princess Anne. Will soon be looking at broadband issues for home computers.

FM, DD – Thank you to Care Ashore for taking in a rough sleeper from Guildford. All port staff working online or by phone, not home visiting. Burden sharing between ports working well. Limited to phone contact with the elderly, e-tea and chat. Most ports engaging with local community groups. Workers can go out and get shopping for the infirmed and isolated. Agencies such as Age UK have shut up shop. Staff still being asked to conduct funerals, cautious on this due to risk to staff, max. of 10 can attend. Agree with MC that a lot of support going in is building up problems for later on.

SMS, JO – Stabilising new working from home arrangements, some IT issues being resolved. Not yet seeing upturn of demand but anticipating it, particularly through FM. Considering how to pre-empt and respond to what could be overwhelming demand and finding ways of dealing with that which doesn't clog up the traditional systems. That will inevitably revolve around pushing support forward and delegating decision making where possible and having communal approach. Funds need to be pushed forward, particularly to organisations like FM so they can respond without all being caught up in bureaucratic nightmare. Exceptional times require exceptional solution. From MN perspective, seafarers are not on PAYE if at sea for more than half the year so big uptake in need could be inbound.

RMNEF, CHW – Increase in numbers, 15 in last week, support tends to be longer term. Need to get as much money to as many people as quickly and as easily as possible with bureaucracy kept to absolute minimum. Moving towards online learning, anticipating considerable demand on resources particularly laptops and printers. Beneficiaries have to have one MN/fishing/RNLI parent who has served at sea and must be in need. Anticipating increasing demand. Have taken hit financially but still well-resourced and can do a lot. Message to all almonising charities is: don't forget children's education. Running trial with FM, can provide up to £100 per child per household (max £250) as 'one off' grant for food or general living costs.

NWF, MH – Care home is in lockdown, skype is set up to enable families to keep in touch with loved ones. All staff are temperature checked when they come into work. Have lost staff members who are either pregnant or in high risk category. No staff have been diagnosed with the virus. Common facilities such as café and gym have been shut. Extra services provided to residents now include cooked lunches. Home care services has grown to provide shopping service for approx. 40 residents instead of the normal 14 or so. Laundry is collected and returned. Caseworkers working from home using phone or videoconferencing. Doing shopping for those who have no other means of doing so. As of today, calling all Mariners' Park residents for daily check. None of the residents have fallen ill. Not had financial issues as focus is on older retired mariners but started to see requests for financial support for working mariners suddenly out of work.

SfUK, CS – Engaging with wide variety of groups across the sector and aware that maritime charities facing substantial demand. Currently talking with trustees and expecting to launch emergency fund. Please contact DL deborah.layde@seafarers.uk to discuss what can be done. Hoping to launch emergency appeal this week and will be in communication in terms of how to get involved and having collaborative appeal across the sector. Supporting advice services, DL talking to people like SAIL recognising they will be dealing with increased number of people in financial difficulties. Recognising fishing industry is collapsing, talking with organisations like FM to try to increase number of people having fish delivered to their door. Will be promoting new online platform to get fish delivered to people within the UK. CS encouraged members to use their own social media to promote this project and to help create new fish markets in the UK at this time when supply chains are difficult.

TH, VM – Board meeting held yesterday, funds set aside for emergency grants over this period, reacting as quickly as possible. Grants committee will go ahead on 1st April with 'needs' reprioritised. If any delivery partners need assistance they should get in touch.

SHS, LW - Working closely with FM and SMS to provide emergency grants and working to streamline the process as much as possible. This is priority and trustees willing to dig into capital. Supporting SAIL as much as possible. Dreadnought not accepting referrals and cancelled most scheduled operations and outpatients. Big White Wall supposed to be for just working and active seafarers but opening it up to retired seafarers or their families. Will pay for increased services needed such as counselling through web cams. Seafit programme run by SHS and FM for fishermen has cancelled events but people can still phone for mental health and wellbeing support. Looking to develop more online services with some of the bigger charities. Sandra Welch starting as CEO on 8th May.

WA, CR – Silverline helpline (invited to the meeting) taken over by Age UK. Has proposed setting up seafarers' calls in QVSR, Care Ashore and Mariners' Park and connecting the care homes. Leaflets and application forms already circulating at Care Ashore but unsure of what funding is available from Silverline. WA has ramped up calls and this could be an area where they could have a small grant and pay someone to carry out Skype keep fit sessions.

KM, IMarEst – Congratulated members on the work they are doing and wished them well. IMarEst provides welfare support to marine engineers, their widows, dependants, children and orphans. KM would be delighted to hear from members who may need funding for these groups.

MCG, GH & VC - MCG can offer help with co-ordination. MCG videoconference to be held on Monday 6th April at 9.30am. Asked members to let them know before then if they have particular issues that MCG can help with or that need broadcasting to the wider maritime charity community. Useful for MCG to think about how there might be a consistent response across the sector. Creative response of maritime charity community to meet needs is a great story to tell and share and should be communicated more widely. VC received email from Samaritans contact who is connected to Befrienders Worldwide and suggested Dave Watkins join next week's group to explain what they could provide in terms of easy access to mental health services for people in crisis. GH thanked members for their useful and insightful updates.

MNWB – Chairman will issue document on way forward for collaborative meetings in next few days. MNWB addressing its grants process to be more responsive.

Closing Remark - Members to forward any links, extra information and note amendments to Celia celia@mnwb.org.uk Please also contact Celia if you would like to invite anybody else to the WGs who may add value or another member of your organisation's staff. Meeting format to remain flexible at this stage. Members content to continue meeting on a weekly basis. Apologies for any unintended inaccuracies.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 1st April 2020 at 11:00

PLEASE NOTE IN FUTURE THE SERVING SEAFARERS & OLDER SEAFARERS WORKING GROUPS WILL BE COMBINED INTO ONE 'COVID19 UK SEAFARERS' WELFARE GROUP' AND MEET EVERY WEDNESDAY AT 11:00.

INITIAL GROUP MEETINGS HAVE BEEN EXTREMELY WELL ATTENDED AND INFORMATIVE. MORE STRUCTURED FORMAT WILL BE REQUIRED FOR THE LARGER SINGLE MEETING.

WORKING TO ENSURE TWO WAY FLOW OF INFORMATION BETWEEN CHARITIES, INDUSTRY & GOVERNMENT.