

Effective Outreach for Your Masonic Angel Fund

by MAF Co-Founder Robert W. Fellows

“Outreach” - that word is the cornerstone of the Masonic Angel Fund program.

Much has been written in these Angel Mail broadcasts about setting up initial contact with schools. There are certain times of the year where we mention the need to outreach our school professionals.

Many who have been with the program for a few years remember our “Tea and Crumpets” email about setting up contact with the schools in our communities. If you don’t recall the article you may read it here

<http://www.masonicangelfoundation.org/NewsItems/newsitem119.htm>

Establishing Trust

Setting up the proper contacts with our schools is only the first part of an ongoing process that must continue for as long as you want your Masonic Angel Fund to succeed.

Once we have met our in-school contact – hopefully the school nurse – we need to develop a relationship with her. The first part of this involves getting the nurse to take MAF seriously.

What do you mean get her to take us seriously? We’re a fine organization with money to spend on the kids... why wouldn’t the school take us seriously? Well, as a principal once told me, the school staff is bombarded with this and that “do-gooder” group that wants access to the school for one purpose or another. Very few of these groups live up to their promises and most disappear rather quickly.

Our Masonic Angel Funds promise a response to any request within one business day. All of us take great pride in how well we do in keeping that promise. In fact, most of our affiliates respond to requests within an hour if not instantaneously. This promise alone sets us apart from other charities but it also sets the stage for skepticism. How many times have our new school partners come across a charity that promises “fast response” only to leave the school dragging for weeks while meetings are held and checks are engrossed?

In short, all too often our new partners don’t believe we are serious about what we have promised to do for them. The key to breaking that very reasonable skepticism is to do your very first benevolence at the school. Once they see MAF do what it promises to do then they’ll come back with another case – and before you know it your program have some credibility.

When John Sherman and I started the first Masonic Angel Fund nearly ten years ago, John patiently visited each of our schools every couple of weeks. Nothing happened but John kept going to see the nurse or principal.

After about two months of this, John's phone rang early one morning. The principal at one of the elementary schools was on the line to tell John that there had been a fire the previous night and that two kids had arrived at school with just the clothes they had been wearing when the fire broke out. She asked for money to take the kids to pick out some clothing and personal items. John took a check to the school within an hour and the kids were taken care of by the end of the school day. The principal related this story at the school district's weekly principals' meeting and thus began the "track record" of the Masonic Angel Fund.

Do you need to visit the schools every two weeks? Probably not. We do recommend that you spend more time with them at the beginning of your program until you start fulfilling benevolence requests. Once that ball has started rolling you can dial back the contact to three or four times a year.

Over time you will see how the school professionals come to trust the Masonic Angel Fund to be there when they are needed. We cannot begin to count the letters that we see from our partner professionals where they mentioned "you are always there when we need you." After a few years you will come to realize how utterly the schools rely upon your Masonic Angel Fund to help their children in need.

When to Make Outreach Contact

When is the most important time of year to make outreach contact with your schools? We recommend four specific times:

- The second or third week of school – This gives the school staff time to get organized and get their year off to a start. By the tenth day of school, teachers and nurses have a pretty good picture of who needs what. School eye exams often begin during the first quarter of the school year. This first outreach of the year is the time when you can re-acquaint your MAF trustees with the school staff, introduce yourselves to new staff members and remind everyone what we do and how quickly we do it.
- The week before Thanksgiving – This is the time of year when it is starting to get cold and the nurses begin to hear of kids who come to school without proper outerwear. This is also the time of year when the school staff begins to look at the holidays and which families might be in need of special assistance.
- The first part of March – As spring approaches we come to the time when utility companies can again begin to disconnect peoples' gas and electricity for non-payment. Most of you already know that we do *not* typically pay utility bills with

MAF money. However, once these families are put on payment plans by the utility companies their cash flow is further impaired and necessities such as after school program fees, (to enable the parents to work) school lunch accounts and spring clothing start to become more challenging. At this time of year we remind the staff that, while we cannot help out with utility bills, we are capable of providing relief in other areas as the challenges arise.

- The next-to-last week of school – With the school year at an end, many of our nurses go off contract for the summer. Before the end of school, the nurses and counselors may come across kids whose families need help with summer program fees (to keep the kids safe while the parent(s) work) or other unanticipated challenges. This is also an excellent time to as the nurse to pass our contact information along to the staff who will remain at the school for the summer in case anything comes up that calls for MAF assistance.

Those are the four key times of the school year to make personal contact. There will always be other times. For example, this month we have encouraged extra outreach to the schools because of the very high cost of home heating energy. It's a cold winter and we hear many stories of kids needing coats, sweaters and winter footwear – but with heating oil at \$3.40 per gallon many parents may not be able to come up with \$100-\$150 for coats, sweaters and footwear.

Selling the Program

Do we mean to say that you have to “sell” people on the concept of asking for our money? Yes!

Simply stated, schools are chaotic places. I was in a nurse's office last week to deliver a check. Standing there, I watched as she juggled a parent phone call, an obviously nauseated little boy and a little girl with an ice pack on her elbow. Another little girl was in the corner, drawing her own blood for diabetic testing. When the nurse got off the phone she talked to the diabetic girl went over what the child should eat at lunch based on her blood sugar count. Then she checked the girl with the ice pack, had the boy lie down with a vomit bucket next to him and came to me to take the check with which she would purchase grocery cards for yet another sad situation. We spoke for about three minutes and her phone rang again. The little boy was turning green again as I left her office.

This is a pretty good exemplar of what goes on in a school office today. Today's school nurse has a much different role than she had when we were in school. The school nurse is a nurse, social worker and medication dispensary. In most schools today a kid cannot carry even aspirin on their person. All medications must be dispensed through the nurse's office.

In such chaos the school professionals tend to address what is in front of them and then move on to put out the next fire. It is very easy for them to forget about MAF as a

resource. Thus, “out of sight” really does become “out of mind”. We often hear of a nurse remembering a situation only when she sees one of the Masonic Angel Fund trustees standing in her office doorway.

Once the request is made, it is important that we continue the “selling” process by making this the easiest process the school has ever initiated. This is why we don’t require schools to fill out forms or other paperwork. We do not want to add to an already heavy work load. Quite simply, we want to hear the request for assistance, say yes or no and if it’s approved get the check to the school quickly. This harkens back to the old sales adage of “Tell them what you’re going to do, do it, and then show them that you did it.”

In communities with successful, active Masonic Angel Funds the school staff (and everyone they talk to) quickly come to view “the Masons” as the people in town who get things done. We come across as efficient, positive and un-demanding.

When you visit your schools, remember to bring something with you. We have a standard, one-page flyer available in the downloads section of the web site. It is a simple black-and-white, 8 ½ x 11 sheet in Microsoft Word format. You can alter it to include information specific to your Masonic Angel Fund and give it to your school contacts. You might even want to see if the school would like multiple copies so they can put them in the teachers’ mailboxes once a year.

Many MAF trustees have purchased computer-generated business cards that they can run off on their own printers. You can also get free or low-cost business cards at www.vistaprint.com – I like the nurses to have one of my business cards in addition to the standard flyer.

The common thread that runs through all of our long-term successful Masonic Angel Funds is consistent, face-to-face outreach.

Consistency of outreach visits keeps us on the front burner in the minds of our partner professionals. As long as the school professionals seem happy to see you when you visit, we recommend that you maintain at least four personal visits a year.

If You Will Be Out of Town

Most of us take vacations and go away for holidays, birthdays and the like. Unfortunately children in need do not take a vacation. If you’re going to be unreachable, please have the courtesy to drop a note or make a phone call to your partner professional so you can tell them what alternate contact person they should call if they need something while you’re away. We have even seen situations where neighboring Masonic Angel Funds set up a “mutual aid” system to cover each other during holidays and summer vacation times. The “on call” MAF takes care of the request within mutually agreed

upon parameters and then the “vacationing” MAF reimburses them upon the trustees’ return.

The last thing any of us want to see is for a nurse to call our Masonic Angel Fund and not hear back for several days or weeks. It only takes a couple of times of that happening to destroy the school’s confidence in our program.

Email Outreach Does Not Work

Many of us are computer-savvy professionals who rely on email in the day to day conduct of our careers. For us, email is as effective a communication tool as the telephone, mail or face-to-face contact. Therefore, it seems only natural to use email as an effective tool for maintaining contact with our school professionals.

Except that it does not work.

We have seen a few affiliate Masonic Angel Funds who say “nobody needs anything so they never call us.” Most of you already know that is complete baloney. However, we will patiently ask about how the MAF trustees are contacting the schools. All too often we find that the contact is being made almost exclusively by email.

With the high level of activity seen in a school office, a “touching base” email will only get someone’s attention for a few seconds before they move on to something that requires their immediate attention.

Moreover, many of our school nurses are regulated by HIPPA and local school regulations from sending out much information via email. Their primary tool of communication is the phone or good, old-fashioned face-to-face contact.

If you need to email a school partner with something specific – such as contact information while you’re out of town or with follow-up information for a particular benevolence – that’s one thing. Please do not use email as your primary means of period outreach to remind the school who and what we are.

Conclusion

The key to a successful Masonic Angel Fund in your community is a consistent program of outreach to your partners among the school professionals. The nurses, teachers and principals must know that the Masons are there to help the children they serve and that we are there for the long term. Your outreach program should establish face-to-face contact with the school professionals at least four times each school year. When transitions occur it is vital that you keep your partner professionals in the loop on contact people for MAF assistance and ensure that their requests for assistance are always answered in a prompt, courteous and efficient manner.

The Masonic Angel Fund is a program that can enhance the image of Freemasonry in your community. Each of our school contacts is either eligible for membership in the Craft or has a husband, father or son who might gain a favorable impression of the Fraternity through our generous acts to help children in need. In this regard, your Masonic Angel Fund trustees truly become the “outside sales force” for your Lodge and for the Craft as a whole.