

**Friends Foundation for the Aging Proposal**  
**Submitted by: Supportive Older Women's Network (SOWN)**  
**September 15, 2022**

**Executive Summary:**

SOWN is requesting support for our innovative telehealth groups to help vulnerable, homebound seniors build the social connection and support they need to improve health and well-being. Lack of social connection has a major impact on health outcomes and is identified today as a key social determinant of health. SOWN connects primarily low-income, older people of color living in under-resourced communities in Philadelphia by establishing weekly telephone groups facilitated by our experienced clinicians. Group members help and support one another by sharing knowledge, resources, and resiliency to assist others coping with similar concerns. SOWN Telegroups also improve health and well-being outcomes by providing nutrition education, healthy living workshops, digital and health literacy, knowledge of services/benefits, and resource information for our participants. SOWN's unique model has profound impact: 98% of participants are less isolated and more connected, and 100% are more empowered belonging to their SOWN group.

**Project Details:**

**Amount of grant request**

SOWN is requesting \$25,000 to support our innovative services for older adults in Philadelphia.

**What is the problem you have identified? Who will be served?**

As baby-boomers age and people live longer, the population of older people is growing dramatically. Philadelphia's population is aging at an accelerated rate with 19% of Philadelphia's residents age 65 or over, and older women making up about 58% of the 60+ population in our city. In addition, Philadelphia has the highest percentage of seniors in poverty of any big city in the county, and the majority these are women. Seniors of color and women are particularly hard hit by poverty due to structural racism and years of systemic injustice. SOWN works toward the elimination of these structural barriers, specifically the intersection of ageism, racism, and sexism. SOWN empowers primarily older women of color living in under-resourced neighborhoods in Philadelphia by building and nurturing local communities, creating social connections, providing education and resources, and fostering individual well-being.

Lack of social connection has a major impact on health outcomes and is identified today as a key social determinant of health. In Philadelphia, half of our low-income seniors live alone and an astonishing 64% of those 60+ report depressive symptoms! These high rates of depression and living alone made social isolation a public health crisis before COVID-19. Today due to the pandemic, isolation among seniors has reached epic proportions. Still, more than 2.5 years after the pandemic began, many senior centers are closed or have reduced hours, community centers and libraries are not open, churches are on zoom, and congregate meals or other activities in senior housing facilities are not occurring. Many older people are reluctant to attend family events and social activities due to fear of the virus. Seniors are well-aware that older people are at a much higher risk of infection, hospitalization, and death due to Covid.

We know today that lack of social connection has extreme health consequences – it is a major public health issue! Social connections are not just nice to have, they significantly affect our health and well-being. Social isolation can lead to anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and even suicidal thoughts. Social isolation impacts our health in other ways too—by escalating unhealthy habits, stress, lack of sleep. Extremely significantly, there is strong evidence today that social isolation increases premature mortality from all causes. Social isolation is associated with a 50% increased risk of developing dementia, 29% increased risk of incident coronary heart disease, and a 32% increased risk of stroke. In fact, social isolation impacts health as much as smoking, hypertension, and obesity. A frequently cited study found that the health risks of isolation are equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day!

SOWN connects older adults living in the community by establishing social networks so they are not alone, stay healthier, and age well in their homes. SOWN reaches 800+ seniors and families in neighborhoods throughout our city: 99% are women, 90% are low-income, 89% are Black, and 2/3rds live in distressed areas of North and SW Phila. with high crime, gun violence, and poverty.

**What is the solution you propose to address the problem?**

SOWN is requesting support for our telehealth groups to help vulnerable, homebound seniors in Philadelphia build the social connection and support they need to improve health and well-being.

**What actions will you take?**

SOWN telehealth groups provide a forum for older adults to share their feelings, receive support, gain knowledge of services, allow peer exchange of ideas/supports, and build social connections. The older adults meet weekly in small groups of 6-8 participants on a telephone conference call facilitated by our experienced clinicians. Group members help and support one another by sharing knowledge, resources, and resiliency to assist others coping with similar concerns. Frequently, relationships developed in the telehealth group extend beyond the meeting to friendships that sustain seniors at home. Our Telegroups also improve health outcomes by providing nutrition education, healthy living workshops, digital and health literacy, knowledge of services/benefits, and resource information for our participants. SOWN will provide 9 to 11 telehealth groups each week for 50 weeks over the year. We utilize an open-enrollment model where new members are incorporated into groups.

SOWN Telegroups are unique. No other similar program exists in the Philadelphia area, and to our knowledge, the country. SOWN has been providing Telegroups to homebound older adults and caregivers for over 20 years. Our model is evidence-based and has very positive outcomes. The telephone modality is easy to use and accessible for older adults. The group is participant-directed, and peer support is provided by the participants. SOWN's skilled staff guide the group experience and empower the older women to share ideas, gain support, and build relationships. This integrated empowerment model of peer direction and support, combined with professional skill in group dynamics and clinical intervention is very successful. SOWN Telegroups provide an easily accessible, on-going support mechanism that truly becomes a lifeline for homebound older adults in our community. SOWN harnesses the power of community to support one another and build sustained relationships that improve health and well-being of underserved seniors as they age.

## **Do you have other partners for implementation or funding?**

SOWN has deep connections and strong relationships with many community-based organizations in Philadelphia developed over our almost 40-year history. We partner with 20+ community-based sites where we have established formal relationships including senior housing facilities, senior centers, community centers, and more. Our grassroots approach includes working with PCA's Latino Advisory Council, African & Caribbean Elders Initiative, Asian Advisory Council, Clergy Interfaith Coalition, CARIE, LGBT Elder Initiative, Senior Law Center, and other agencies that provide information/advocacy services for seniors in Philadelphia. Current key funding partners include The Philadelphia Foundation, William Penn Foundation, Philadelphia Corporation for Aging, and Independence Foundation.

## **How will you know your actions are having an impact?**

SOWN uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to measure outcomes and impact of our program. A survey of participants is conducted at intake to gather baseline data and at one-year intervals. The SOWN survey includes items adapted from the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale and the PHQ4 depression screen. Our data system, Apricot, is a state-of-the-art system designed specifically for SOWN's data tracking, outcomes, and evaluation needs. We regularly use data reports for program evaluation, planning, design, and improvement. Review of evaluation measures and reports occurs regularly at staff and department meetings to inform our programmatic development. We also conduct regular focus groups with SOWN Telegroup participants to determine service impact and guide program development. We will use our data collection and analysis capacity and the consultation of our part-time Data Analyst, to monitor progress and capture the impact of our telehealth groups on our participants.

Our goals are as follows:

- 95% of participants will report less isolation and have increased social connections
- 95% will feel they belong to a group of people who they can count on
- 80% will have increased knowledge of and access to other resources

SOWN's unique model has profound impact. In our most recent evaluation in July 2022, 98% of participants felt they were not alone, 88% learned about resources, and 100% felt more empowered belonging to their SOWN group. As one member responded, "I have learned that talking and having SOWN helps me as the group makes me feel I'm not alone. Thank you."

## **Brief statement of organization history and competence for this project**

Founded in 1984, SOWN has worked to advance the well-being of older adults in Philadelphia for almost 40 years. The cornerstone of SOWN's services is our signature peer support group modality. Since 2002, SOWN has served the many at-risk, low-income families in Philadelphia where grandparents are raising their grandchildren. SOWN is a learning organization that continually looks to innovate and develop effective ways to help adults build resiliency and thrive. We have a long and successful history of expanding programs and bringing them to scale. SOWN has been very effective over the years in developing and funding new, innovative program initiatives to meet the changing needs of older adults. SOWN holds contracts with the Philadelphia

Department of Human Services (DHS), Philadelphia Corporation for Aging (PCA), and several managed care organizations, and we are supported by an array of private foundations and funders. SOWN has been the recipient of many grants and awards for our innovative work. Recently we were honored to receive the 2022 Impact100 Philadelphia Award, The Transition Network Philadelphia 2022 Award, and 2022 Community Champion Award.

### **How does SOWN address diversity, equity, & inclusion? How is project aligned with FFA values?**

SOWN's programs and organization are guided by our mission and centered on our vision of enhancing equity and well-being of low-income older adults of color in Philadelphia. Our DEI statement clearly reflects our values: *SOWN advocates for a world in which people of all races, ages, cultures, sexual orientation, gender identities, and abilities are treated fairly with dignity and respect.* Our values align with FFA values in reflecting diversity, equity and inclusion in our participants, staff, and board. Our target population of low-income, older women of color in Philadelphia is one of the most under-served and under-recognized groups in our community despite their extremely high level of need, years of experiencing inequities, deep poverty, and significant health/social disparities. SOWN's programs are built on an empowerment model that recognizes the potential of older adults. SOWN participants routinely mention the power of the SOWN group experience in helping them and providing an opportunity to help others. This mutuality builds participants' self-esteem and self-efficacy in a remarkable way.

SOWN highly values collaboration and our core group model is built on partnering with other agencies/organizations as host sites and referral sources. We engage all levels of our staff and our participants in decision-making and planning. We meet monthly for organizational "Lunch and Learn" sessions where all staff and administrators share ideas, thoughts, information, and decision-making. Participants regularly are involved in focus groups regarding our programs and feedback sessions following workshops/activities. Participants meet with funders, organizational consultants, and planners for program input and new innovation ideas. Many of our direct service staff are older women and some live in the communities we serve.

Just like FFA, SOWN is committed to innovative programs that are integrative. From our beginning in 1984, SOWN's programs were boundary spanning – breaking out of the mold of traditional senior services. We brought our service to older people ... in their apartment building, health center, library, or on the telephone in their own home. We identified that older people's emotional well-being is intricately tied to their physical health, social needs, sense of purpose, and spiritual/intellectual life. And, we recognized that due to this complexity, service solutions that really work need to be out-of-the-box, person-centered, accessible, and flexible.

SOWN advocates for systems change for isolated older women and their families with funders, aging organizations, health/behavioral health providers, school system/educators, city and state government, and more. Our staff and participants have worked with legislators, mounted advocacy and voter registration campaigns, and acted as "ambassadors" telling their stories. SOWN works for justice and the elimination of inequities and structural barriers, specifically the intersection of ageism, racism, and sexism.

**Program Budget:**

**Supportive Older Women's Network  
Telehealth Groups Project Budget  
July 2022- June 2023**

<b>1 REVENUE</b>	
<b>2 Earned Income</b>	
3 Contracts	28,288
4	<b>28,288</b>
<b>5 Grants</b>	
6 Donor Restricted for Program	40,168
7 <i>Friends Foundation for Aging (this proposal)</i>	25,000
8 General Operations (Unrestricted)	17,102
9	<b>82,270</b>
<b>10 Other Revenue</b>	
11 Individual & Board Contributions	12,450
12 Revenue Other	1,992
13	<b>14,442</b>
<b>14 TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>125,000</b>
<b>15 EXPENSE</b>	
<b>16 Salaries and Benefits/Taxes</b>	
17 Salaries	78,687
18 Benefits/Taxes	14,524
19	<b>93,210</b>
<b>20 Contract Services</b>	
21 Accounting and Audit	2,324
22 Benefits & Payroll Admin	581
23 IT Systems/Computer Mangmnt	3,320
24 Prof. Svcs (Consultants, Data Analyst)	10,707
25	<b>16,932</b>
<b>26 Other Expense</b>	
27 Bank / Finance fees	125
28 Conferences	110
29 Depreciation	2,324
30 Dues, Fees etc.	332
31 Insurance (P&C, PL, DO)	830
32 Office Supplies	374
33 Communications/Paid Media	498
34 Photocopy/Postage/Printing	624
35 Meeting Expenses	99
36 Rent	8,630
37 Telephone	797
38 Transportation	116
39	<b>14,858</b>
<b>40 TOTAL EXPENSE</b>	<b>125,000</b>
<b>41 NET</b>	-



OGDEN UT 84201-0038

In reply refer to: 0437744135  
June 06, 2008 LTR 4168C E0  
22-2629856 000000 00 000  
00032522  
BODC: TE

SUPPORTIVE OLDER WOMENS NETWORK  
4100 MAIN STREET STE 200  
PHILADELPHIA PA 19127



008962

Employer Identification Number: 22-2629856  
Person to Contact: Janice Petersen  
Toll Free Telephone Number: 1-877-829-5500

Dear Taxpayer:

This is in response to your request of May 28, 2008, regarding your tax-exempt status.

Our records indicate that a determination letter was issued in September 1986, that recognized you as exempt from Federal income tax, and discloses that you are currently exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

Our records also indicate you are not a private foundation within the meaning of section 509(a) of the Code because you are described in section(s) 509(a)(1) and 170(b)(1)(A)(vi).

Donors may deduct contributions to you as provided in section 170 of the Code. Bequests, legacies, devises, transfers, or gifts to you or for your use are deductible for Federal estate and gift tax purposes if they meet the applicable provisions of sections 2055, 2106, and 2522 of the Code.

If you have any questions, please call us at the telephone number shown in the heading of this letter.

Sincerely yours,

*Deborah Bingham*

Deborah Bingham  
Accounts Management I