

**Friends Foundation for the Aging Letter of Intent**  
**Submitted by: Supportive Older Women's Network (SOWN)**  
**August 31, 2022**

**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?**

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, isolation among seniors has reached epic proportions. We now know that lack of social connection has extreme health consequences. Social isolation can lead to anxiety, depression, and substance abuse. Significantly, strong evidence indicates social isolation impacts health as much as smoking, hypertension, and obesity. In fact, 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% of our clients 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 that 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. Key to our success is SOWN's "trust-based service model." Our skilled clinicians build trust with participants, and the peer model enhances trust among the group participants. SOWN telehealth groups are a lifeline for isolated seniors.

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

SOWN partners with 20+ community-based sites where we have established formal relationships including senior housing facilities, senior centers, community centers, and more. We have a long history of collaborating with the PCA and other aging agencies in Philadelphia. Current key funding partners include The Philadelphia Foundation, William Penn Foundation, Independence Foundation, and Scattergood Foundation.

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

SOWN uses quantitative and qualitative methods to measure our impact. A survey of participants occurs at intake and at one-year intervals. The SOWN Survey includes items adapted from Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale & PHQ4 depression screen. SOWN's unique model has profound impact. In our most recent evaluation, 97% of participants felt less isolated and 100% felt more empowered belonging to their SOWN group.

**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 has been the recipient of many grants and awards for our innovative work. Recently we were honored to receive the 2022 Impact100 Phila. Award, The Transition Network Phila. 2022 Award, and 2022 Community Champion Award.