



## **Aging Outside the Walls: Care for Older Adult Exonerated Survivors of Death Row**

### **March 2023 Application**

**Summary of the Project and Amount Requested.** Witness to Innocence (WTI) is requesting 40,000 to continue to provide targeted peer support services for the approximately 23 death row exonerees in our program who are over the age of 60, as part of our DREAMS program.

#### **Has the identified problem changed?**

As of March, 2023, Witness to Innocence (WTI) serves 25 death row exonerees who are over the age of 60. This Friends Foundation grant supplements the DREAMS programs work to help address the lasting economic, physical, emotional, and social effects of incarceration on death row survivors through a focused effort on older adults. The needs and numbers of our older adult members continue to change as they age. Now more than half of our population are over 60. We also indirectly support family members, of whom many are also older adults. Some exonerees are supporting spouses with age-related challenges and more are undergoing such changes themselves. The one exoneree mentioned last year who is supporting his spouse with dementia continues to be her primary caregiver. Others are supporting spouses, children, and parents with physical challenges.

The identified problem has not changed, however, organizationally, our financial circumstances have changed, and this has the potential to affect our ability to address the identified problem. Our largest sustaining funder, which generously supported half of our budget for more than a decade, has postponed all grants for approximately a year so that death penalty abolition groups worldwide can reorganize into consortia for the purpose of funding abolition work. While rooted in financial logistics, this development opens up the possibility for Witness to Innocence to provide a model for other organizations who work with impacted people, and fellowship for other death row survivors. However, this gap was much longer than expected and has impacted half of our overall budget, including the salaries for Peer Specialists. We do not know exactly when funding will again be available, so we have revised our budget and are actively seeking diverse funding sources. Many have stepped up to help us, and our priority is our exoneree members and staff.

#### **Have your solution or goals changed?**

We remain committed to our peer support model which provides validation and practical understanding of the issues faced by death row exonerees. Coupled with consistency of social services, we have found it to be the best way to help death row survivors overcome trust issues and connect to the resources they need. For this year, our top priority is simply to sustain our existing services for exonerees despite our funding gap. Non-exoneree staff are taking pay cuts of 25-40%, but we are maintaining exoneree staff at current hours. We are working hard to overcome this so we can come back to full staff by winter, while also consulting with exoneree staff so that they can take on more responsibilities for the organization.

Last year, we reported that we would be adding a Family Peer Specialist to our social work team. Due to our funding circumstances and the need to prioritize exoneree support, we did not have the capacity to add another position. For now, the Director of Social Work and the Peer Specialists will continue to assist exoneree family members when it is feasible, including those of the older adult exonerees.

After this coming grant period, we will be working on ways we can share our peer support model with other exonerees through relationships built in our worldwide abolition funding partnership. Many of those exonerees have not had any access to peer support. We will also encourage other organizations to work from a model of care for those impacted by the system, so they have the support they need to do the work to change it.

**Will your efforts/actions to impact the problem change? Describe.**

In addition to continuing education as the field continues to grow post-COVID, we will also explore formal training with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) in the future for our Older Adult Peer Specialist. This year, our Executive Director was invited to complete training to become a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist at no cost and, once he has completed his certification, we hope to secure space for the Older Adult Peer Specialist to complete the program as well. This will also allow us to open additional doors to training for other exonerees who may be interested in serving in a peer support role within and outside of the organization in the future.

**Are there changes in funding or program implementation partners?**

As mentioned above, The European Commission has put a pause on grants for death penalty groups while reorganizing into funding partnerships. This impacts funding for our Peer Specialists. The United Nations remains a major partner in our work, funding us through the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture. We shifted the current UNVFVT grant budget to help maintain the current peer specialists' positions during the funding gap, rather than hiring a new family peer specialist. We continue to seek alternative sources of funding. We will also explore whether our program would fit Medicare guidelines and what steps would be needed to be reimbursed by Medicare for services.

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

The DREAMS program team will continue to utilize clinical documentation to monitor activities, and evaluate impact based on limited qualitative self-report data. Units of contact are documented in encrypted, digital charts noting type of contact, date, and a summary of the content of the conversation or meeting. This data is typically only used internally or reported out for funding purposes but has occasionally been used by legal teams working on behalf of the victims to demonstrate positive progress and bolster cases for financial compensation post-release. The increase in our exonerees' abilities to connect digitally has allowed us to familiarize them with using digital surveys to track their speaking events, so we plan to use this familiarity to create short text or email surveys for them to report back on the work they do with our social work team in a small way as well.

**How will you sustain the program after the grant period?**

The UNVFVT has committed funding that covers the Director of Social Work salary and some Peer Specialist work until the end of 2023. We have applied for and are optimistic that they will continue to fund this work beyond 2023. WTI expects to be able to apply to the European Commission (EC) in the fall of 2023 through our international funding consortium. Because we are the only organization in the consortium that is led by impacted people, and our role as a humanitarian organization, we are hopeful that some of this funding can be directed once again to supporting our Peer Specialists and our work overall with exonerees. We remain committed to the approach that the work of exonerees in their advocacy against the death penalty is intertwined with their well-being, and will include this work in our budget. Our advocacy work for criminal legal reform such as fair compensation for exonerees and government programs continues and it will help to address their needs will lessen the need for our support in the long term. Recently, one exoneree received compensation after a bill passed in Maryland following years of WTI advocacy there. We are currently actively engaged in advocating for compensation in Florida where several WTI exonerees live, and where a compensation bill is under consideration.



**Project budget with projected income (including other sources) and expenses.**

Budget : Care for Older Adult Exonerated Survivors of Death Row- 2023 Grant Application FFA				
	Grant Request - Friends Foundation for the Aging	Other Revenue Sources Projected	Project Total Projected	Notes
Full Time Older Adult Peer Specialist Salary and Benefits	\$40,000.00	\$11,000.00	\$51,000.00	If funding available -Estimated through FY 24. Includes medicare supplemental insurance and taxes. EC increased funding is uncertain and if available, would be for the second half of the grant period.
Peer Specialist Hours (prorated Peer Organizer for this Project)		\$16,000.00	\$16,000.00	Pending funding -Pro rated for this project European Commission funding is uncertain.
Director of Social Work - Training/Supervision Social Work Staff		\$20,000.00	\$20,000.00	Pro rated amount of salary and benefits to this project, covered by UNVFVT through 2023, application pending for 2024.
Travel- Older Adult Exonerees to Care		\$600.00	\$600.00	important if needed
Office Space/Administrative Overhead Cost		\$1,500.00	\$1,500.00	Reducing office space due to funding gap.
Social Work Team Travel		\$3,000.00	\$3,000.00	If funding available
Exoneree Direct Emergency Expenses		\$45,000.00	\$45,000.00	significant increase due to possible restricted donation.
Equipment/WiFi/Etc & Training		\$600.00	\$600.00	Most outfitted already, some budget for new exonerees, replacements needed, etc.
	<b>Total Request Friends Foundation</b>	<b>Total Other Sources</b>	<b>Project Total Projected</b>	
	\$40,000.00	\$97,700.00	\$137,700.00	

**Notes on other sources of income:** The UNVFVT has committed funding that covers the Director of Social Work salary as well as some Peer Specialist salary, and we have applied for 2024. WTI maintains long-term relationship with the UN and we are optimistic that they will continue to fund this work. WTI is experiencing a significant funding gap due to reorganization by our major funder, the European Commission (EC) which impacts half of our total budget, including a large share of Peer Specialist salaries. We hope to be able to apply for more EC funding in the fall of 2023, although the amount we can expect is uncertain at this time and as always, subject to the currency exchange rate. Private donors and unrestricted funds will be used to cover exoneree emergency expenses and other uncovered expenses. We have applied to another private foundation for support for the Peer Specialist (organizer) and hope to hear about that soon. One restricted grant provides additional direct exoneree support - that grant extends through 2023 and will likely be renewed in 2024.

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