

# **Friends Foundation for Aging New Grant Proposal**

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Organization: African Family Health Organization (AFAHO)

EIN: 73-1670436

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Address: 5901 Larchwood Avenue; Philadelphia, PA 19143

Amount requested: \$16,000

Project title: Wisdom Village

## **Summary Description (maximum 25 words):**

The “Wisdom Village” positively impacts the lives of African and Caribbean Immigrant elders in greater Philadelphia who are experiencing loneliness, social isolation and other issues.

### **1. What is the problem you have identified?**

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), social isolation and loneliness have a serious impact on physical and mental health, quality of life and longevity and it is increasingly being recognized as a priority public health problem. Similarly, studies from Harvard University’s School of Public Health indicate that individuals who lack social connections are at higher risks of developing conditions including heart disease, stroke and dementia. Loneliness and isolation can also increase the risk for premature death by 26% and 29% respectively.

Nursing homes do not exist in African and Caribbean societies. No one ages alone, as elders live with their immediate or extended family members who care for them. They also live in communities where loneliness is rare as they are constantly in communion with others. In the U.S., they face a different reality – one of loneliness and isolation. In 2024, AFAHO polled 39 elders ages 60+ in the African and Caribbean immigrant community in greater Philadelphia representing 8 countries to inquire about the top 5 issues they face. 73% indicated that isolation and loneliness was their number 2 top issue, a clear indicator that this is increasingly becoming a threat to elders in our target community. Despite this, their needs remain largely unaddressed due to the myriad of barriers to care, services and resources faced. Socio-economic status, lack of English proficiency and cultural compatibilities with other elder programs, technological lapses, living far away from family and friends, poverty, lack of health insurance and ineligibility for benefits leave many African and Caribbean immigrant elders residing in greater Philadelphia vulnerable, isolated with limited human interaction, cut off from health and social services and at risk for abuse (financial and other) and adverse life and health outcomes. This project is significant because there’s a growing number of ACI elders in Philadelphia who are invisible and suffering in silence, especially those who are Limited English Proficient.

## **2. What is the solution you propose to address the problem?**

AFAHO's "Wisdom Village" addresses the social isolation and loneliness faced by African and Caribbean Immigrant (ACI) elders in greater Philadelphia by creating the missing "village." In the ACI culture and traditions, creating a "village" is an act of "reimagining the communal support system which the elders are familiar with, and this concept underscores the belief that the collective involvement of a community is essential to achieving a goal or completing a task." In their home countries, many elders in the ACI community had strong social supports, mutual assistance, respect and compassionate care that made aging a joyful process, but they lack that here. This program will bring ACI elders together to create a community focused on tackling mutual challenges and building a collective support system. It also aims to foster and reactivate dignity, hope, trust and love to our elders. Using "Wisdom" in the name of the program is intentional to indicate the importance of elders in our community who are keepers of history and stories and filled with wisdom and knowledge. Even for those who never received a formal education, they have so much to offer and this project validates and honors their lived experiences.

Goal: The Wisdom Village aims to improve the quality of life for and reduce social isolation among 25 mainly Limited English Proficient African and Caribbean (ACI) elders in the greater Philadelphia area.

Objectives:

1. Foster social connection and empowerment among 25 ACI elders.
2. Facilitate regular communication (in-person and via WhatsApp) to reduce loneliness among 25 ACI elders.
3. Improve knowledge about different health issues among 25 elders.
4. Provide important health screenings including blood pressure, blood glucose, Hepatitis B etc to 25 elders.
5. Assist 25 elders in accessing healthcare and other social services/benefits.
6. Offer recreational activities including gardening, cooking, arts and crafts etc for 25 elders.
7. Provide group counseling to address low-intensity mental health concerns including depression, stress and anxiety for 25 elders.
8. Reduce food insecurity among 25 elders.
9. Improve intergenerational communication between ACI elders and youth.

## **3. What actions will you take?**

Bi-monthly gatherings will take place to address isolation and loneliness by creating a safe and supportive space for social interaction and sharing, where Limited English Proficiency will not be a barrier for participation. As most of those we have worked with speak French and Mandingo, it is anticipated that the gatherings will be multi-lingual. One of the elders will be contracted to serve as the leader of the group and she speaks 5 languages, ensuring ease of communication. A WhatsApp group will also be created to offer regular communication and interaction between them and to share important information. The group will be monitored by the elder leader and AFAHO staff.

Some of the activities during the program period (that will take place at the bi-monthly gatherings and on an individual basis as needed) will include:

- Conversational English to improve speaking and comprehension skills
- Arts and Crafts activities like crocheting, drawing etc
- Gardening with our partner at Bartram's Gardens
- Regular communication and interaction via an elders WhatsApp group
- Health education and screenings
- Speakers on various topics
- Assistance with benefits application for eligible elders
- Food Assistance
- Transportation to attend programming or other important appointments
- Behavioral health support groups (group counseling)
- Digital Literacy
- Field Trips
- Pair elders with youth in AFAHO's AYEP program for mutual learning and understanding where the youth will provide digital literacy to the elders and the elders will offer history, cultural and language lessons to the youth.

#### **4. Describe the population to be served.**

African and Caribbean immigrant elders ages 60+ especially those who are Limited English Proficient, residing in greater Philadelphia are the target population for this program.

#### **5. Are there partners/collaborators for implementation or funding-who? Has the solution been tried by other organizations?**

Yes, the Sarah Ralston Foundation has provided some funding for this program. Other partners include Bartram's Gardens which offers gardening plots to elders in the Spring and Summer; L.J.S. therapy providing group counseling and mental health services to participants; WSFS bank with financial literacy; various religious institutions in the community; Philabundance which provides non-perishable food items to elders; Philadelphia Corporation for Aging; Drexel University and a host of other community and institutional partners.

#### **6. How will you know your actions are having an impact? How will you measure outputs and outcomes?**

To evaluate the effectiveness of the Wisdom Village, we will conduct surveys on a quarterly basis to gauge impact on the aforementioned project objectives and to determine areas of improvement. These surveys will be done anonymously to offer opportunities for honest feedback including any dissatisfaction. We will also conduct informational interviews sporadically as another avenue of impact information gathering and utilize pre and post tests during health education workshops to determine knowledge change. All these tools will be created for those with Limited English Proficiency and low literacy to include both words and pictures and done in 3 languages. Intake forms to collect demographic data and understand client needs will be completed for all participants with follow-up notes to report any progress on addressing needs. Lastly, attendance records will be kept for each activity.

## **Wisdom Village Program Budget One-Year**

### **INCOME**

Sarah Ralston Foundation - \$35,000.00

**TOTAL INCOME - \$35,000.00**

### **EXPENSES**

#### 1. Salaries & Benefits

Director of Programs & Operations (3%) - \$2,400

Manager, Social Services (5%) - \$3,400

Programs Assistant (10%) - \$6,000

Total Salaries = \$11,800

Total Benefits (23%) = 2,714.00

Total Salaries & Benefits = \$ 14,514.00

#### 2. Direct Program Costs

Elder Program Facilitator (One of the program elders is paid as a contractor to serve as the team lead of the group and as the main point of contact between staff and the group) - \$1,100/month for 12 months = \$13,200

Food Assistance to 25 elders (25 elders receive fresh fruits and vegetables bi-monthly at a cost of \$40/elder monthly) = \$1,000/month = \$12,000/year

Transportation Assistance (approximately 11 elders are provided with 2 round trip Septa passes monthly = \$5/pass = \$10/month for 11 elders) = \$1,320

Refreshments during Wisdom Village Activities (\$125/month) = \$1,500

Program Supplies (arts, crafts, gardening and other supplies) = \$2,750

Office Supplies – \$650

Field Trips (transportation and food for 2 trips/year) = \$ 800

Total Direct Program Costs = \$32,220.00

Total Direct Costs = \$46,734.00

Total Indirect Program Costs (10%) – \$4,673.40

**TOTAL PROGRAM EXPENSES - \$51,407.40**