

Written evidence submitted by Oyovwe Agatha Kigho

Call for Evidence Government Support for Charities.

Oyovwe Kigho BA, POL, BCAh, Founder, of The Widows Empowerment Trust, awarded winner for Combating Loneliness across United Kingdom by ITV-Good Morning Britain (2020). Social Activist on bereavement, strong community leader, social voice for Widowed community, Ambassador for championing volunteers and student's placement opportunities.

Oyovwe Innovation ideas for mitigating Loneliness and Isolation faced by Widowed community and others vulnerable communities, has been recognised and honoured by UK Prime Minister Mrs Theresa May (Points of Light UK'S 1225TH - 2019). Also recognised and awarded British Citizen Award for health (BCAH) Medal (2020).

Oyovwe has received other numerous awards and recognition for her work including The National Lottery – Good cause, shining a light on her by dedicating an Engraved Bench Monument to her and The Widows Empowerment Trust (2021), waiting to be launch after the lockdown in Manchester for her outstanding and exceptional services in reducing loneliness and social isolation caused by the unprecedented, unrivalled scientific and global challenges that affected all communities especially the community she is serving, now facing multiple challenges – such as **grief, lockdown**, the risk of contracting the virus itself and its impact on overstretched health services, to the knock-on effect on the health and livelihood system. She adapted her service to respond to these new challenges, both now and in the longer- term.

BEFORE Covid19 (our services)

The Widows Empowerment Trust is charity based in Manchester to support bereaved spouses and other vulnerable communities, founded in 2017 and is volunteer led. We currently have 76 volunteers who run the organisation, we have supported more than 350 beneficiaries and over 3000 volunteers have gained value skills with our charitable objectives and regular fundraising. Our mission is to reduce loneliness and isolation of bereaved spouses. We run four different wellbeing workshop centres across Manchester including Dementia support and peer to peer support. We run varied range of activities such as sewing, knitting, crochet, cooking, craft, and karaoke. Along with befriending services either by phone or face to face. For many people experiencing Isolation and mental ill health, our group is a real benefit. it offers people to build social support network, encourage growth of confidence and interpersonal skills. Every week we have consistently high number of people attending our weekly activities in our different centre (Average of 25 people per session). Also, reaching out to Average of 35 people weekly over the telephone. Widows can become the most marginalised group in the society but underrepresented and often those in the greatest need. whether in terms of emotional, physical, social psychological. Our vast majority of our clients are older people, however, we provide services regardless age, colour, sexuality, faith, religion, disability, nationality etc.

Covid19 support service

The effective ways we adapted to limit the impact of the loneliness & isolation faced by our community include Bingo, Crafts & Quiz. Also, befriending services using a telephone to chat up with our beneficiaries encouraging activities, sending letters, cards and helping with shopping. These activities have helped our group to feel socially connected and feeling sense of belonging. Nearly one in five older people (17%) say they can go a week without speaking to a friend, family member of neighbour. For one in ten (11%) this is over a month. More than 75% says feelings of loneliness are out of control, for 3.6 million older people television is their main form of company

The government funding that we received through The National Lottery fund has really helped us to reached 100s of widowed & other vulnerable communities. The Running & core cost such as staffing,

has helped us to provide reliable, coordinated, monitor our activities, volunteers, and continuous support for our beneficiaries. The funding has helped in bringing our community together. Teaching our older people how to use their devices on zoom to connect, was one of the toughest challenges ever faced as an organisation. However, we provided volunteering opportunities for over 300 volunteers across United Kingdom. Which has helped to develop their employability skill, empathic and interpersonal skills. Also, given volunteers insight about grief, bereavement and loss

The funding has helped to support 24 student placements from The Manchester Metropolitan University. Due to covid-19 our fundraising ability has been vastly reduced and has made us more reliant on applying for funds. The funding from the government has provided the vital support that we needed as an organisation to be able to make a real difference to the lives of those going through grief, loneliness, and isolation. We continually receive referrals from other agencies.

For more information, please visit our website and social media platform

www.widowsempowerment.com

www.facebook.com/widowsempowerment

www.twitter.com/widowsemptrust

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