

HELPING WOMEN DISCOVER THE POWER  
OF **MUTUAL SUPPORT** AS THEY AGE



**SOWN**  
Supportive Older  
Women's Network

*Because no woman should have to age alone*

**“SOWN OFFERS OLDER WOMEN  
A WAY TO CONNECT AND  
SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER.”**

—Helen

### The changing face of aging

Today most women who are age 50 and older can expect to live longer, healthier and more active lives. However, along with new opportunities, modern life has created new challenges for women as they age.

Older women now find themselves juggling multiple roles and transitions. Many must learn to adjust to physical changes, loss of loved ones and new living arrangements. Some women struggle with serious health conditions that limit their mobility. Others must abandon work or social activities to care for aging parents or an ailing spouse.

Recent medical advances are helping people with dementia and other long-term disabling diseases to live longer than ever, but this can strain the energy and resources of their caregivers.

Some women must suddenly resume childrearing, when grandchildren suffering from neglect, abuse or other hardships are left with only their grandparents to raise them.

Over time, too many older women grow isolated, losing the support network of family and friends that has sustained them.



*20th Anniversary Quilt made by the women of SOWN*

### Helping older women find the mutual support they need

Because women represent the vast majority of older persons living alone, they are deeply affected by issues of caregiving, isolation and poverty. Mutual support provides a vital lifeline.

But the very isolation of modern life and the burdens of caregiving or chronic ill health can create major hurdles for women trying to connect with the mutual support that they need. Creating flexible programs and services to foster and sustain that kind of support has been the primary focus of SOWN.





“A SUPPORT GROUP MAY BE  
TREATMENT. SIMPLY PUT,  
VERY POW

## The Supportive Older Women’s Network: A safety net for women as they age

The Supportive Older Women’s Network (SOWN®) was launched in 1982 as a non-profit agency, dedicated to helping women survive and cope with some of the complex issues of aging.

SOWN provides a crucial safety net. It remains one of the only organizations in the country exclusively devoted to serving the special needs of women as they age.

SOWN has pioneered a unique network of mutual support groups facilitated by trained professionals that has become a national model. Beyond its core services, the organization, based in the Philadelphia region, has also developed innovative, community-based programs that have won wide recognition.

More importantly, ongoing research demonstrates that the model of social support pioneered by SOWN offers significant benefits to the emotional and physical well-being of older women.



## SOWN Programs

### COMMUNITY GROUP CONNECTION

#### *Community Support Groups for Older Women*

Since its beginning, SOWN has brought thousands of older women together in support groups in neighborhoods and senior residential settings across Southeastern Pennsylvania. SOWN has launched more than 120 support groups tailored to the needs of racially-diverse, isolated and frail older women.

SOWN members form enduring connections. Nearly 70 percent of SOWN groups have continued to meet for more than ten years.

Groups meet weekly under the guidance of a SOWN professional who helps foster ongoing leadership from within the group. Through participation, SOWN members learn to:

- solve common problems
- share their joys and sorrows
- try out new coping skills to manage changes and losses
- feel more in control of their lives
- seek out and access new resources
- support one another through hardships.

### TELEPHONE GROUP CONNECTION

#### *Telephone Support Groups for Homebound Older Women*

Many older women suffer from chronic health conditions that make it impossible to leave home. With mobility curtailed, these women feel lonely, isolated, overwhelmed and forgotten.

Weekly telephone support groups led by a SOWN professional make a dramatic difference. Members connect on a personal level, regardless of their disabilities and challenges. They encourage and support one another while bringing renewed meaning and dignity back to their lives.



AS EFFECTIVE AS COSTLY MEDICAL  
HAVING SOMEONE TO TALK TO IS  
POWERFUL MEDICINE.”

— Journal of the American Medical Association

### CAREGIVER TO CAREGIVER CONNECTION

#### *Telephone Support Groups for Caregivers*

Caring for someone with Alzheimer’s Disease or other chronic illness can be a 24-hour a day job that leaves



little time for caregivers to connect with others or take time for themselves. Caregivers often become overwhelmed and depleted. In these specially designed SOWN telephone support groups, caregivers facing these unique challenges can receive

valuable peer support, helpful ideas, resource information and encouragement—without having to leave home.

### GRANDPARENT CAREGIVER CONNECTION

#### *Support Groups for Grandparents and Other Relatives Raising Children*

Grandparents are raising their grandchildren in record numbers. SOWN brings grandparent caregivers together in both community-based and telephone support groups.

SOWN augments these groups with one-on-one counseling, training, problem-solving and educational programs.



“CARING FOR SOMEONE WITH  
ALZHEIMER’S IS A LONG  
LONELY ROAD. **THE GROUP  
BECAME A LIFELINE, AND SOWN  
STAFF BECAME FRIENDS WHO  
COULD FINISH MY  
SENTENCES FOR ME AND  
UNDERSTAND MY PROBLEMS  
LIKE NO OTHERS COULD.”**

—Pat



**“WE ARE BETTER ABLE TO COPE WITH THIS TIME IN LIFE BECAUSE OF SOWN. WE HAVE LEARNED THAT IN SHARING OUR PROBLEMS, THEY BECOME LESS STRESSFUL. WE CAN COME TOGETHER EACH WEEK AND HELP EACH OTHER.”**

— Rose

“ I HAVE LEARNED THAT I DON'T  
HAVE PROBLEMS THAT ARE  
MINE ALONE .”

— Dorothy



#### OTHER SOWN PROGRAMS

##### Volunteer Connection

SOWN offers volunteers a variety of opportunities, including telephone reassurance, group facilitation and organizational support.

##### Individual Counseling

SOWN also provides individual counseling to older women and their families who can benefit from additional support, referrals and information.

##### Training for Professionals

As a leading provider of support group services for older



women, SOWN staff have particular expertise in the areas of aging, group processes and women's issues. They lead training programs and address gerontology and other professional conferences.

##### Advocacy for Older Women

SOWN plays a significant role in advocating for issues of concern to older women, including healthcare, economic hardship, access to services and quality of life.

##### Sponsored Research

Researchers have found that the more isolated women become as they age, the more vulnerable they become to depression, illness and early hospitalization. SOWN conducts extensive cutting-edge research with leading universities regarding the psychological, emotional and health benefits of participation in support groups.

##### Benefits of SOWN Membership:

Living happier and healthier lives

The relationships formed in SOWN groups create a “family of friends” that older women desperately need. These friendships often transcend the formal group

meeting. Many group members check in with one another on a regular basis to provide support and assistance.

The benefits of SOWN membership are clear. Women report they feel happier, more interested in life and more cared for when they join a group.

SOWN support group participation:

- reduces depression and social isolation
- encourages women to take better care of their physical and mental health
- helps older women lead more independent, productive lives.

Be “SOWN” into our future:

Giving makes a difference

SOWN depends on your generosity to make its programs and services available to all women — regardless of income or disability. Our services provide a vital safety net for hundreds of older women. Help us expand that safety net to all those in need by sending your tax-deductible contribution today to SOWN, 2805 North 47th St., Philadelphia, PA 19131.



##### Getting started

To learn more about the services SOWN can provide, contact us at:

Supportive Older Women's Network (SOWN)

4100 Main Street, Suite 200

Philadelphia, PA 19127

Phone: (215) 487-3000

Fax: (215) 487-3111

Email: [info@sown.org](mailto:info@sown.org)

Web: [www.sown.org](http://www.sown.org)

Member:



A copy of the official registration and financial information for SOWN may be obtained from the PA. Department of State by calling toll-free within Pennsylvania: (800) 732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.