Helping Vulnerable Older Adults Age in Place
General Operating Support

I. Proposal Summary

Founded in 1972, Search and Care's purpose is to seek out vulnerable, homebound, isolated older New Yorkers. We provide relationship-based, in-home Social Work and other specialized Supportive Services across East Harlem, the Upper East Side, the Upper West Side and other communities on a case-by-case basis—always free-of-charge and not time-limited. The agency works to ensure older adults remain safe, socially connected, and emotionally secure in their own homes for as long as possible. Search and Care requests $12,000—*or any amount feasible*—in general operating support to bolster our holistic Social Work/Care Management and complementary Supportive Services—including *Money Matters* financial guidance, *Silver Circles* tech/telehealth coaching, *Medical Escorting*, *Nutrition & Emergency Groceries*, *Groups* socialization, *Pets + Elders Together (PET),* and more.

II. Narrative

Organizational Background

Founded in 1972, Search and Care is a service agency dedicated to providing free, comprehensive, home-based care to older adults across Manhattan. Serving East Harlem, the Upper East Side, the Upper West Side, and surrounding neighborhoods, the agency ensures that low-income, vulnerable, and homebound seniors can age with dignity, security, and independence in their own homes.

Search and Care operates with high fiscal responsibility and independence, relying on private funding for 70% of its budget and investing nearly 80 cents of every dollar directly into client care. Minimizing reliance on rigid governmental funding and accompanying strict service protocols allows the agency to utilize a person-centered, adaptable, and high-touch approach. In FY26 alone (still compiling final statistics), Search and Care served 2,165 older adults—a 24% increase compared to FY25 and a 70% growth in its overall client census since FY24.

Needs Statement

Citywide statistics reflect the significant obstacles to aging safely faced by older New Yorkers, challenges experienced by our clients daily. The ability to successfully age in place is severely threatened by a convergence of demographic shifts, economic stressors, and a volatile public benefits landscape. New York City's population of adults aged 65 and older is growing rapidly. Between 2000 and 2023, this demographic expanded by 53%, growing 17 times faster than the city's overall population. Unlike outdated Federal Poverty Guidelines, The Elder Index—nationally recognized, devised by devised by the Gerontology Institute at the University of Massachusetts Boston—measures the realistic cost of survival in New York City—including housing, healthcare, and food. With average Social Security benefits yielding roughly $18,000 to $22,000 per year, older adults face a severe annual shortfall. This income gap leaves many older New Yorkers technically "above" federal poverty thresholds—disqualifying them from vital public benefits—yet financially unable to afford basic necessities.

This financial precariousness is exacerbated by a severe housing crisis and inflation. Over 61.7% of older tenant households in the city are rent-burdened, spending 30% or more of their gross income on rent. One-third of these older adults live alone, significantly increasing the risks associated with isolation and home accidents. A report from NYC Aging—formerly NYC Department for the Aging—highlights the depth of this economic strain, finding that 41% of older adults report difficulty paying at least one regular bill, 30% struggle to afford healthy food, 25% lack stable housing, 28% have at least one limitation to leaving their home, and 25% have experienced age discrimination.

Healthcare access remains similarly restricted. According to the NY Academy of Medicine (2025), 37% of older adults report primary care as scarce, 64% find community mental health services unavailable, and 36% struggle with mobility challenges. Chronic disease management often leads to fragmented care delivery, compounded by cognitive health issues, which remain a critical and often invisible obstacle.

At the same time, the social safety net is under strain due to an increasingly uncertain benefits environment. We have observed clients and older adults in the community becoming very anxious about their ability to support themselves. This has forced our Social Workers and Care Managers to spend countless hours—4 hours on hold not uncommon—navigating government bureaucracies on behalf of clients. Furthermore, despite the passage of the $125.8 billion Fiscal Year 2027 city budget in June 2026 by Mayor Zohran Mamdani and City Council Speaker Julie Menin, advocacy groups like AARP New York maintain that the Department for the Aging remains drastically underfunded. The executive allocation of $577.1 million accounts for less than 1% of the total city budget. Older adult coalitions originally urged City Hall for a $2.3 billion baseline to properly address the needs of an expanding and vulnerable demographic, noting that flat funding ignores inflation and leaves critical areas deeply strained. This underfunding forces agencies to stretch stagnant resources, resulting in rising waitlists for homebound older people requiring home-delivered meals and exacerbating severe staffing shortages and deferred physical maintenance at neighborhood older adult centers.

Funding Request (See report form for outcomes)

Search and Care respectfully requests $12,000—*or any amount feasible*—for general operating support. Search and Care addresses these major social determinants of health by stepping in as a surrogate family member, closing care gaps, collaborating with partners, preventing healthcare fragmentation, and maintaining a strict no-waitlist policy despite surging community demand. Search and Care differentiates its core services through a high-touch, time-unlimited model grounded in social work standards, including the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) *Standards for Social Work Case Management*. Search and Care services are provided free of charge and without arbitrary time constraints. This gives our staff the flexibility to maintain a therapeutic relationship, build trust over time, and uncover complex, unaddressed needs that isolated older adults might not initially express.

Social Work and Care Management: The foundation of our client support, Search and Care's free, home-based, and personalized Care Management is provided by our dedicated team of thirteen, composed of licensed Social Workers, seasoned Care Managers, a Clinical Director (LCSW | BCD), a Program Director for the Upper West Side (LMSW), and a Program Manager (MSW). This diverse team reflects the communities we serve, including seven Spanish-speaking members. Our Care Management is unique in that it goes beyond the time-limited, goal-oriented assistance provided by many agencies, instead working to uncover unaddressed needs, fill gaps in care, coordinate with partners, and address the holistic needs of clients. Often, we act as a surrogate family member for many clients without support—identifying and addressing needs through internal or external services. Beyond securing vital benefits and entitlements like Medicaid, Meals on Wheels, SNAP, Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemptions, etc., that ensure older people have access to resources, our Care Management provides support that addresses the full spectrum of what clients require to age safely at home, including mental health support, supportive counseling, housing advocacy, care coordination with outside providers to effectively address a large spectrum of needs, crisis intervention, and more. Care Management also coordinates with our other specialized Supportive Services, which complement it by filling major care gaps. To manage rapid census expansion without compromising response times, Search and Care added a full-time Community Intake Worker in June 2026 (seed-funded by Isaac H. Tuttle Fund and Florence V. Burden Foundation) to serve as the initial point of contact and streamline program referrals.

Silver Circles Tech and Telehealth Education: Silver Circles connects older adults with essential tech services, tools, and opportunities through one-on-one and groups coaching by volunteer and paid Computer

Coaches, connecting them with friends, family, and virtual programs, enabling access to online financial tools, and more. In addition, it increases access to critical services like telehealth—teaching older adults to schedule appointments, message providers, video call with doctors, manage medications, and more. Now providing this coaching as a pilot project at Mount Sinai's The Martha Stewart Center for Living—with funding from The Fan Fox and Lesley R. Samuels Foundation—our Team provides telehealth training onsite, offering one-on-one coaching, hosting workshops, and scheduling in-home coaching. With referrals from doctors and hospital staff, this partnership streamlines our community's most in-need clients, while enabling care coordination to improve health outcomes. A recent evaluation of the program found respondents rated the program 4.7out of 5, with more than 75% reporting increased comfort with their devices, while participants in our Telehealth trainings reported a significant jump in digital health proficiency, with self-assessed MyChart knowledge rising from 1.8 to 4.4 on a five-point scale. Striving to correlate our interventions with improved health outcomes at the Martha Stewart Center for Living, we are pursuing joint funding with the New York Academy of Medicine to conduct a robust evaluation beyond client self-reporting.

Money Matters Financial Guidance: Money Matters provides free, in-person financial guidance to older adults, empowering them to achieve financial security. Our dedicated team—comprising a Money Matters Coordinator (MS in Gerontology), a Licensed Master Social Worker, and four Financial Navigators (primarily retired finance professionals)—offers a comprehensive suite of services, including document organization, budget planning, bill payments, stipend applications, and tailored financial consultations. This hands-on approach is especially vital for older adults who may struggle with technology, lack support, or face social isolation. By building financial literacy, Money Matters ensures clients can confidently manage daily necessities like food, housing, and healthcare, supporting their overall health and wellbeing. Over 80% of survey respondents reported improved financial stability—half of whom noted it "improved a lot."

Groups Socialization and Educational Activities: Search and Care's Groups programming tackles social isolation by connecting older adults through skill-building and community engagement. Our hybrid format—offering in-person and virtual sessions with one-on-one tech support from Silver Circles staff—ensures homebound clients can participate. Groups include educational and interactive sessions on healthy living, cognitive health games, decluttering, chronic disease management, healthcare navigation, support groups, and engaging activities like art and games. We received a grant to make our backyard a functional and attractive green space for group participants, including extending Wi-Fi to the space, purchase of furniture, elevated rolling garden beds, equipment for exercise and other group activities, and more. Approximately 90% in a program evaluation responded strongly that "Participating in Search and Care groups has helped me improve my overall quality of life."

Medical Escorting: For isolated older New Yorkers with mobility challenges or anxiety, attending in-person healthcare visits is often impossible without support. Furthermore, many New York hospitals require a companion to take an older adult home after a procedure—a significant barrier for those who live alone. Our Medical Escorting program engages vetted, trained, and paid professionals to accompany older adults to and from vital appointments. As other agencies have shuttered similar services, we have become one of the few providers of free escorting in our catchments. Our Escorts work in collaboration with Care Managers to ensure clients consistently attend healthcare visits, preventing critical delays in care and providing a sense of comfort that reduces medical-related anxiety.

Nutrition and Emergency Groceries: Our Nutrition and Emergency Groceries Program addresses food insecurity through a comprehensive, multi-pronged approach. With our partner West Side Campaign Against Hunger (WSCAH), we provide 50 vulnerable older adults experiencing hunger with 6 fresh food grocery deliveries—an essential additional support after we have already secured them benefits. We also provide clients with support from our trilingual (English, Spanish, and Mandarin) Community Nutritionist (MS, Clinical Nutrition, Registered Dietician) who provides meal planning, evidence-informed counseling, arranges for nutritional supplements, and facilitates groups. Finally, we have an Emergency Groceries Fund that provides

culturally appropriate food to homebound and/or financially vulnerable clients during emergencies, especially those awaiting or ineligible for benefits.

Pets and Elders Together (PET): The PET program addresses the significant isolation many clients face and the suffering experienced by companion animals when their aging guardians become unable to care for them, ultimately resulting in many being left in the shelter system. The PET program ensures that both receive the many benefits (physical and psychological) that result from the human-animal bond, by helping older adults care for companion animals. We do this by coordinating care with veterinarians, arranging for assistance from volunteers, working with our partner PAWS NY to get in-home recurrent volunteer support and help rehome animals when necessary, providing Advanced Pet Planning to ensure pets do not enter the shelter system when clients experience an emergency, and facilitate access to our Emergency Pet Fund—a vital support created by funders to provide critical veterinary care for companion animals when they do not qualify for or exceed limits on existing supports (e.g. ASPCA's veterinary care program).

5. Program Evaluation & Quality Assurance

Search and Care incorporates a dedicated, part-time Program Evaluation Consultant—a distinction rare among small to mid-sized non-profits—to design and track quantitative and qualitative metrics. In addition to survey tools and client service tracking, the evaluation structure maintains an active Client Advisory Committee, where agency participants provide direct feedback on services and community needs to keep program design grounded in client realities. As stated above, we are pursuing joint funding with the New York Academy of Medicine for a robust evaluation of our telehealth education services.