

Sandwell African Women Association – Charity No: 1166949

Covid-19 case Studies

Personal stories – NET Funding End Users' Testimonies

Our success is built on the successes of the women that use our services. Read some of their personal stories below to find out more about how your financial support together with our volunteers' effort have helped vulnerable elderly refugee women during the pandemic.

The Marceline's story - The worries of a being alone at home during Covid-19 (Translated from French)

"Being suddenly told that you no longer need to socialise because of Covid-19 lockdown was hard. Aside from the financial hit that you take by having your pension money being paid late, you've no longer a reason to go out shopping. I've found that very frustrating and as a result, I've been sleeping in until the afternoon, and then not being able to sleep until the early hours of the morning – my routine has completely gone out the window.

The volunteer support workers from Sandwell African Women Association (SAWA) during lock down did prep with me – setting up online shopping accounts, setting up online prescription orders, chemist deliveries – ensuring I have all the essentials to stay well. They have collected and delivered essential food parcels to my door steps. They've also looked into local support offered by the council and the community if my family couldn't help out, and that's been really reassuring.

They have linked me in with lots of voluntary services in the community including food bank in Smethwick. They have printed off adult colouring sheets and posted them to me as I was struggling with my mental health as this is in activity that I enjoy.

As I was accessing basic Maths and English courses via MIND to keep my mind active, SAWA volunteers have contacted MIND and requested they send some home learning work sheets for me to work on while in social isolation to keep me busy as well as maintain my new found confidence. THANK YOU SAWA!"

Marie Louise and her Story (translated from French)

With a pre-existing mental health condition, Marie Louise, 61 years old from Sandwell, found that the pandemic acted as a trigger for a number of her anxieties. She sought the help she needed from SAWA to enable her to create a new routine with a clear mind.

"Just before the coronavirus (COVID-19) reached the UK I was in a much better place than I had been for a while. I decided to come off my anti-depressants and was working with the GP to lower my dose before coming off them entirely. Then the stress of COVID-19 hit, affecting everything from home, work, and my mental health.

But I got help from Sandwell African Women Association (SAWA) because I was able to recognise this time round that it was what I needed. A volunteer support worker from SAWA phoned the GP to explain how I'd like to return to my original dose and that's what I did. I also consented for SAWA's volunteers to be collecting medication on my behalf since I was scared to go out for fear of contracting Covid-19.

There's no shame in saying you need help. In just a couple of days I was able to see things a little clearer.

Over the past couple of weeks, I've felt much better and getting into a new routine has helped me a lot. I have a list of non-negotiable and negotiable activities that I can do in a day. Non-negotiable activities include things like getting dressed, eating three meals a day, some kind of movement. Negotiable activities are things like reading for 20 minutes, walking 5,000 steps a day – they're nice to have, but they aren't essential to my mood. If I don't do my non-negotiable activities, that's when I notice myself starting to feel bad again.

I try to remind myself that it's important to have a bit of fun. At first, I felt really guilty about whether I should be enjoying myself when the world isn't in a great place, but then I realised that it's ok. It's nice to have something to look forward to, it's important for your own mental health, and it's no good punishing yourself, it doesn't help anyone.

I now make sure that I get up at eight every day, take time away from my screen and go out for a walk in the back garden to section off my working day from my evening. The volunteer tells me to get dressed to start my day off. At first I was a roll out of bed into my second set of pjs kind of person, but the difference it's made is huge I can't advise this enough".

Mama Leki Emilie's story

Mama Leki Emilie, 62, told us about the pressure she felt in needing to 'achieve' something during lockdown. She found the pressure she was placing on herself was too much, and just getting through the day was enough. Thanks to support received from Sandwell African Women Association (SAWA), support funded through National Emergencies Trust (NET) via Heart of England Community Foundation (HoECF), Mama Leki Emilie says:

"Since being in lockdown I've been up and down. At first, I felt that there was a real pressure to come out of this period looking and feeling better than I have before. There was so much time that I needed to do something with it. All I was doing was putting needless pressure on myself.

I started to feel horrible about everything and soon recognised signs of my depression and anxiety starting to build back up. I couldn't wake up on time, I was eating more, I was struggling to focus and kept breaking down.

SAWA helped reassure me that it's ok not to feel great all the time. So I took some time out to do nothing – to reset. Volunteers kept regular contact over the phone to ensure I was staying well and to keep up to date on my needs.

Maman Celestine's testimony

"As soon as I moved from supported living to independent accommodation the Covid-19 lockdown hit. It was hard. A friend of mine put me in touch with Sandwell African Women Association. I've built a positive relationship with the group via phone and WhatsApp and they shared with me that it was difficult to meet face to face with their appointee in the office. They informed me they have received funding from National Emergencies Trust to support elderly women like me with basic necessities of life, needed to survive during the pandemic. Food delivery a week was arranged and I thought this

arrangement is what was needed. While considerations for social distancing were in place, to avoid any risk of infection, one shopping trip was needed weekly. I contacted the appointee (SAWA volunteer) and now the delivery has changed to accommodate my need for one shopping trip per week. I'm pleased to say I continue to enjoy a positive relationship with the group and the appointee. Thank you SAWA".