

The Impact of Empowerment Programs and Inspiring Communities for Widows

BY CAROLYN MOOR

As women live longer in the 21st century, widowhood becomes a developmental stage of life that many women face in their lifetime, and yet, very few programs or communities exist worldwide to educate, inspire and empower these widows to lean into life, build sustainable resilience and then, turn around to release their potential in making a positive difference for themselves and in society. In an article at *Health Psychology* sponsored by the *American Psychological Association*, a study determined “*After a three-year period of time passed, emotional and social functioning improved among most of the widowed women*”, it also said, “*These findings underscore the resilience of older women and their capacity to reestablish connections, but point to the need for services that strengthen social support among women who have difficulty during this transition*” (Wilcox). Furthermore, providing evidence for the need for programming for this ‘gap in the system’ between grief and reconciliation that leaves a formidable widow often on her own, fending for herself, as she forges onward seeking to master one of the life’s greatest challenges. During this struggling transitional stage of life between a widows two worlds,

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who she was previously as a married woman and who she will become currently as a new widow, requires a new perspective that can only be found if she has access to positive new connections, communities, skills, and knowledge that are meant to champion her to thrive.

Currently, in modern society, widows are exclusively offered programs and services during the first few years of widowhood based on mental health and grief recovery. They are mainly focused on facing, managing, understanding, accepting and hopefully, healing their bereavement, feelings of sadness and many times, crippling depression. But the next phase, the phase that needs researching, includes the years beyond the initial shock of being widowed and instead focused intently on the reasons why it is vital to creating a new future and a renewed sense of identity. This phase, which I'll dub as the 'inspiration and empowerment phase', matters greatly to not only her survival, but also, her ability to thrive and be healthy.

When I became a sudden widow at age thirty-six, after a romantic Valentine's Dinner, I also became a sudden solo parent of two very young kids. In my pain and confusion, the longing for someone, a mentor, to be a guide in this journey through the numerous obstacles and challenges in daily life emotionally, financially, legally and spiritually was dominantly obvious. Complicated obstacles such as how to handle in-laws, what to do with belongings, facing the guilt of dating again, explaining death to my kids and how to manage my finances were paramount. I learned as much as I could on my own, but I had such a great need to connect with other women who had walked this same journey before me.

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What was discovered quickly is that widowhood is quite isolating and lonely, because of this, it was important to find a safe haven, a positive, close, understanding community of like minded others as well as vital role models and mentors. As a woman begins to recreate her life, having a community soon becomes the ultimate game changer to *“bounce back after a certain amount of time”* (Wilcox). Unfortunately, when few resources exist, the struggle is delayed and the mental health of these women is threatened. In the article, "The Effects of Widowhood on Physical and Mental Health, Health Behaviors, and Health Outcomes: The Women's Health Initiative", the research findings show that widows experience less stress from *“not having to care for an ill spouse or found professional or personal support and learned some positive coping strategies”*. Since these studies show that strategies and the programs provide improved overall health and life-long beneficial results, it leaves me to ask, “why aren’t there more widow programs?” and more importantly, “what can I do to change that?”

First, the foundation of educating others about the plight of widowhood would need to occur. One day, sitting in my office on my computer, searching for a way to help educate others, I typing in the word ‘widow’ into my search engine, a famous quote by Helen Keller, an American author, came across my screen, it read,

“I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything but still I will not refuse to do the something I can do” (Keller).

Coincidental? I think not- because it reminds me how far one’s compassion can resonate for those in need. I find it ironic that from Helen Keller’s quote, a deaf-blind person, I’m reminded of how wide my eyes have been opened about the plight of widows

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in the world and how all change begins with the intentional awareness that we are all connected in our experiences as humans. This was the reason for educating others. You don't have to particularly become widowed to understand what it feels like to know the painful feeling of losing a partner you cherished. You simply need to pay attention and be willing to be present with others in that pain.

With that said, and equally important as educating the public is educating widows as well because there are many avenues to spend excavating the widowhood experience. Modalities I used were traditional psychotherapy, eastern medicine, physical fitness, filling a home with positive affirmations and managed emotions, sometimes with the help of medications, but what most people long for first is a real person to show them the way. They want someone to draw on their collective experiences and validate the complexity of their widowed journey; to console them when they failed, also, to celebrate their successes. Years after the death of their life partner, a widow begins to ask, "who do I turn to?" and "Who do I learn from?" When I couldn't find these resources a decade into being a struggling younger widow, I haphazardly became a mentor and, then, those I mentored encouraged and urged me to form a nonprofit to inspire and empower even more widows to lean into life. Since then, it has had a positive, affirming ripple effect for many widows. By founding and launching the Modern Widows Club, a community of widows what society sees as 'moving on', a way to 'carry on', 'it's time to get on with life' and 'keep busy' is in fact, true in some sense, but very different for the griever. 'Moving on' is a term used for those who do not fully understand the journey, 'moving through' is for those who completely understand the journey. But for every widow, the

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deeper question is always, 'move onto what?'

As a widow seeks to find 'inspiration and empowerment' to 'move through' and therefore, lean into life, a bridge between traditional existing grief programs and programs to encourage inspiration, empowerment and healing are needed. This will require out-of-the-box thinking because as it stands now there are no such programs in existence. However, exploring how and why it should exist is a worthy endeavor.

The power of finding one, compassionate and empathetic person, in widowhood is key to developing a program. At Modern Widows Club, thousands of widows are doing widowhood better, more empowered, and not bitter. There is accountability, a focus on the positive and as a result, they are three thousand widows strong (and growing), all because each one sees the other doing what appears to be impossible in the wake of grief. In this case, it seems, seeing is believing. This is a powerful reason why these programs need to exist.

So where are the compassionate and empathetic people who care about widows? From my personal experience and research, sadly, I found very few of these individuals and organizations attempting to serve the millions of widows in need. There are organizations, namely, Second Firsts, Soaring Spirits International, One Fit Widow, Widows' Harvest Ministries, Widow Wednesday, Widow Care, AARP Widowed Persons, Hospice Support Groups and Grief Share. Most are service project oriented, short term, and/or hope and healing focused- all good things. Some are religious and some are secular. But none of them is based on scholarly studies or proven programming for the ongoing, long-term benefit of living as a widow beyond the first few years. They are, at

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best, and with good intentions the band-aid offered for the holistic brokenness and loss in identity a woman will experience in widowhood that cannot be patched quite that easily.

Widowhood as a life stage is positioned under the public assistance umbrella of women services, grief recovery, depression counseling or legal and financial consulting, but after a few years, where is a widow to go to ‘do life’ with their new path in full bloom creation mode? Reality TV? Oprah? Church? When a widow is ready, it is natural for her to find what motivates and inspires her. So, where does she turn to become positively inspired and empowered to engage, connect and give back? Where does she regain her value? Here in lies, the ‘why’ for new services, resources, communities and role models to be developed.

Everyday people become widowed, and every day their families, friends, and associates know not what to do with them. This week in a Modern Widows Club private forum, Kristen puts it this way,

“How I’m feeling of late...invisible...like no one really sees me anymore. They see what makes them comfortable and ignore the rest. They don’t know what’s going on inside your head – the – mind numbing cocktail of anger and sadness and guilt. They just don’t know” (MWC).

Let’s go back, and learn about widows in history for a moment to give us a frame of reference. In the early 1900’s families and churches mainly cared about widows based on religious convictions and familial obligation, but this has changed in the last century. The legislature of Social Security in the 1950’s began giving financial support to widows, often due to war fatalities, and on top of this, families moved further away from each

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other with the ease of mass transportation and global commerce. Churches today, often times, focus on ‘positive engagement initiatives’ like marriage, orphans and global missions, but few have executed local widows outreach initiatives leaving widows feeling invisible in congregations, even though the primary scripture in the Bible (Zondervan), James 1:27, calls for devoted believers to practice their faith as if “*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after widows and orphans in their distress*”. From an informal, local survey taken in the Central Florida area by Modern Widows Club Orlando chapter volunteers, only 5% of the 150 churches and synagogues we inquired formally served widows with a service. Widows are not being served in this capacity. Some churches didn’t even have a ‘widowed’ status box on their information sheet to identify their current widowed community. Widows must choose the ‘single’ box instead in these cases, or in guilt, the ‘married’ box. Both apply, yet neither fits nor serves a widow’s needs. This is a clear example of how the widowed are invisible in plain sight. Most churches offer standard grief counseling and Grief Share, and many widows partake. As time goes by, though, they are placed in singles and women groups, full of others who simply cannot comprehend the vast emotional rollercoaster of widowhood. This results in a spiritual disconnect and mistrust, which often times requires leaving one place of faith and moving onto another to support their survivorship, or changing their beliefs altogether, exactly at a time when spiritual faith can sustain and be fully embraced.

Subsequently, this brings up an important topic about widow programs, fear, and trust. In general, people don’t trust strangers, but they trust people. That is the case for

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widows, but it can become an issue for widows as time goes on. Her confidence is shaken, her independence is threatened, mental confusion heightened and her intolerance for being uncomfortable is her new normal. It is a world of constant agitants that must be dealt with. For this reason, many women will first look inward for answers. Spirituality, in any form, assists in increasing resilience, conquering fear to the point of becoming what author Marc Schoen, Ph.D. of *Your Survival Instinct is Killing You: Retraining the Brain to Conquer Your Fear* tags as 'Discomfort Masters'. He believes that adversity (in this case - widowhood) is the vital component to catapult our ability to awaken our natural resilience and desire to connect with a Higher Power. Connecting with a Higher Power brings peace, comfort, reassurance, empathy and gratitude- come what may. If we find a way to be comfortable with our fear, we have a much better chance of reigning in our physiological and spiritual selves to not only recover what was lost, but to emerge as a larger version of ourselves. In other words, a more spiritually connected, empathetic human being. So, if who we believe is caring for widows, in fact, is not, this is more evidence for independent program development.

It was shocking to discover that there are very few studies in general on the topic of empowering widows and little to nothing on widow mentoring or leadership. But here is something interesting- widows eventually migrate to one another. A club no one wants to join. In my daily life, I've become a literal widow 'lightning rod' because when family and friends discover in their desperate search for resources to help relieve the pain and alienation that is felt by their mothers, sisters, aunts, grandmothers and friends, they find out as well that there is virtually nothing available. So in turn, they immediately look for

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another widow to connect to them. From my experience, few widows will turn down a request to help another widow.

The amount of widows that find a connection is undetermined and unknown, but in my research, however, there were many statistical studies on the geographical population of widows to give a frame of reference. It turns out that approximately 15% of all women on earth will become widowed in their lifetime. Again, how can that large of a number have very few programs and resources? Is it possible that widows are an invisible subculture? Maybe people don't care because they don't know the reasons to care. After all, you can't care about what you don't know.

In more detail on the population of widows, here are some facts to consider: national and international entities like the U.S. Census Bureau and the United Nations recognize widows and keep a geographical count on who has become widowed in the world for obvious economic and social development purposes. In the U.S. according to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are currently 14 million widows and approximately 14% of our male and female population has lost a spouse (Elliot). Four million of these 14 million widows are under the age of sixty-five years, the current, traditional retirement age in the U.S.

Globally, the numbers are staggering at 258 million widows caring for 585 million children, up from 200 million and 500 million in 2010 (Loomba). This indicates that women are globally becoming more widowed at an alarming rate. Statistically, women live on average 15 years longer than men (Arias), according to the U.S. Census Bureau and U.S. widows in truth have the most resources and privileges as well

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(Loomba). With that said, maybe if we empower a percentage of the educated and resourceful U.S. widows, they will, in turn, help the third world widows with their voices, their resources, their time and political power.

You see, worldwide, widowed conditions, especially in developing countries, are catastrophic. Often impoverished, they face a lack of employment resources, experience discriminatory inheritance rights, at high risk with their health, socially marginalized and disowned by the family. These societies accept this as ‘customary and traditional’ to rape, steal and dishonor a woman because her husband died. The threat is personally high for a widow, but even more so, for her vulnerable children. New findings indicate these high-risk kids are suspected as the origin of fueling many points in the human trafficking world crisis.

So with these enormous facts in mind, the question of ‘Why aren’t there more development and funding programs that offer support to these widows?’ One authority on this topic is the UK’s The Loomba Foundation, whose 2015 Global Widows Report alarmingly states,

“Widows have fallen below the radar of even the most pro-active governments and reports worldwide. Becoming a widow in a developing world can have far-reaching consequences for individuals and societies at large.” (Loomba)

This leaves one to wonder how a society could be so uncaring, possibly unknowingly, for these women.

To begin with, let’s talk about the source of this evidence and how this information came to be. One would need to realize, the Loomba statement above hails

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from an organization that took over 10 years of research and thus, presenting to the United Nations to finally acknowledge and recognize that widows have a plight and have a cause. Thankfully, in 2010, the UN finally ordained and approved an annual global day of awareness and action by creating International Widows Day every June 23. Where Patrons-In-Chief such as power players Sir Richard Branson, of Virgin Airlines, and famous widows like Yoko Ono, John Lennon's widow, speak out via YouTube videos that are promoted on social media about the atrocities widows face every day around the world. It seems, albeit unknown, if people won't listen to widows, maybe they will listen to celebrities and entrepreneurs who care. A day like International Widow's Day is rare indeed, for that reason, widow advocates are grateful to stand united in light of this recognition; another reason why widows finding connected communities and growing in numbers could prove to be powerful for using their voice towards awareness of widow statistics, as well as, empowerment programs.

Dr. Alan Wolfelt, a national leader in grief education, shared in his book *Understanding Your Grief*,
"For many grieving people, support groups are one of the best helping resources. In a group, you can connect with others who have experienced similar thoughts and feelings" (Wolfelt, pg. 127).

and

"What you need now are caring, non-judgemental listeners" (Wolfelt, pg. 126).

Widows understand widows in a reciprocal way. It's a classic 'been there, done that' scenario. But widows should not do this alone living with their sudden life change and

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debilitating emotional grief. They need to find ways to learn to regulate their emotions, adopt a positive outlook on life, stay holistically healthy and accept new challenges effectively. They must also reach out for help to heal by maintaining a close and supportive social network and observing and imitating resilient role models. This is summarized in *The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges* (Southwick and Charney) with this comment,

“Widowhood is not a passing stage of grief, bereavement, and adjustment, but instead it represents another developmental phase in which women can expect to live for an average of 15 years (longer than their spouses)” (AIWH).

The number of widows isn't decreasing, conversely, they are increasing, so the importance of more programs to direct and support widows choices greatly determine her quality of life there after.

The dilemma of creating more substantive widow programs is complicated. On one hand, you have all these widows who want community and mentors, and on the other hand, they themselves cannot create them in their disadvantaged state. So, the hope is that somewhere in society, a program already exists that will, in fact, increase their natural ability to overcome, build enough resilience to create their own comeback story and then turn around and integrate back into society as a viable and purposeful citizen. If only more widows had access to bridging this gap with training, participating in feedback and then, being a part of the solution vs. only being a part of the problem.

Changing the face of widowhood, will take a change in how we see a loss. As we've learned here, society is often at odds with what to do with these formidable

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widows in their communities. Places of worship, traditionally those who care for widows, see them as 'long-term objects of need' and families are under educated and under-resourced. Society misunderstands by urging her to 'carry on', and what is misunderstood, is therefore, underserved. As an example, when I became a new widow, I showed up at my own place of worship at a 'widow's luncheon' and was abruptly asked at the sign-in table if I was there to volunteer. As I lifted my eyes, I looked across the room of gray-haired women munching on tiny appetizers and sipping tea, I knew instantly that I was not in a place of understanding. Widows forge their own path silently solo because often they have no other option.

Beyond this, the cruel avoidance, exclusion in social circles and downright ignorant remarks from clueless but 'well meaning' do-gooders leaves a widow speechless and feeling even less understood. Many people quickly grow weary of conversations about death and loss, which seems to threaten their own mortality fears.

Although understanding and changing societies view of what a widow 'is' or 'is not' is difficult, it isn't impossible. It only takes a simple internet goggling of the word 'widow' to see what conjures what our mass population 'thinks' when they see or hear the word. You'll see vivid images of black spiders and action figures along with starving third world women and children begging on streets of Vrindavan, India dressed all in white. None of which portrays the real vision of the majority of modern-day widows in the U.S. who are seeking services and programs.

To me, it's a great price to pay for all humanity when we don't see the value in serving and encouraging these women and their empowerment in modern society. So

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again, who is willing to make the effort to change this scenario?

At the Stanford Center for Compassion and Altruism, there is progressive, current research that is solidly educating society on the important topics of developing more compassion and empathy. It is scientific and evidence-based. It's also mending what is termed "compassion fatigue" (Shanafelt, et. al). New cutting edge programs like this show the real science, neurobiology, physiology and benefits of developing behavioral programs that encourage compassion for self, compassion for others and compassion from others. It surprised and thrilled me to discover such an elite, well-respected, 'Ivy League' programs in action, specifically catering to compassion development because I've always been a very compassionate person in general, but in widowhood, it is necessary to find in order to thrive. Being very close to my grandparents growing up, I was devastated when my grandfather committed suicide and caused my whole immediate family to fall into a depression. I didn't understand grief and reconciliation back then, but over the years, I've learned to work hard, and search 'high and low' emotionally to find new ways to develop genuine well-being, happiness and an ability to love and trust deeply again. The unending effects of grief touch every ripple of life and those around you as well. It turns out, having a highly developed heart for compassion helps to facilitate the 'openness' towards healing during adversity. Widow mentoring programs need to be built on this kind of compassion-based research. The studies at Stanford have shown that compassion is, in fact, a trainable skill. So there is hope in the world for more compassion, and hopefully this will translate across all boundaries to the widows, to society and the programs committed to serving their best life.

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Many people are unaware of how exactly and how long-term widows struggle in the mourning process of facing loss, understanding grief, then moving into the ‘inspiration and empowerment phase’ recreating their new identity and finding purpose again after losing a partner. One example of a practical struggle to consider is U.S. women currently earn seventy-eight cents on the dollar (NCPQ), this factors in the overall wage gap and earning capability for widows. There aren’t any statistics I could find on how many women must sell their biggest asset, their homes, or lose them in foreclosure, but it is presumed this number is higher than most people realize. These women find themselves in financial and legal nightmares with having had no life insurance or having ever managed money personally.

On top of all that, their physical bodies take a real hit with imbalanced hormones and adrenal fatigue. Basic life skills shared with another person who is now absent suddenly becomes a huge disadvantage to daily practical survival. Simple tasks become challenges that were formerly distributed by two, now must be accomplished by one; things such as changing light bulbs, repairing faucets, car repair, lawn maintenance and understanding electronics. The learning curve seems unsurmountable.

Each widow faces different obstacles at different times, so it would seem to be advantageous to have a virtual ‘menu’ to select from if and when a widow is seeking a resourceful solution. In a perfect world, she could tap into a resource from one central point via an internet webpage by applying filters into a database. This central point could include a plethora of education on topics such as emotional health, finances, physical health, intimacy, dating, relationships, life skills, career building skills, interior spaces,

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and spirituality. An all encompassing ‘one stop service’ for widows sounds like an innovative new idea that makes complete sense- to widows.

Since most of the existing research is on older widows, I found more evidence-based information geared toward their benefit. In like manner, I believe ‘societal conditioning’ plays a role in why this kind of research predominantly exists. Pharmaceutical, medical, financial and insurance companies fund these studies to benefit their own bottom line and consumer markets. According to an article in *Public Health Nursing* about the daily living skills among older widows and widowers, “*following a self-help support group*” there are many who found “*increased hope, improved skills developing social relationships, enhanced coping, new role identities and less loneliness*” (Stewart, Craig, MacPherson, & Alexander). Existing programs are working well for this age group, yet still, there are few.

The statistics on our thriving, aging population alone requires the need for more research towards widow programs. With human longevity at its highest in a century, the widowed population is soon to follow. With 39.4 million current U.S. baby boomers (born between 1946-1964), it is predicted that over 80% of these men and women will become widowed in their lifetime. The aging population is on a fast paced rise and predicted to reach 53.2 million by 2020, 69.4 million by 2030 and even higher after that (NIA). You can imagine how these intervention style social groups could generate enormous and lasting health benefits. One area I see that is benefitting is lightening the load of our overdrawn U.S. healthcare system. Healthier widows would mean less medical care. If we teach women to do better in widowhood vs. bitter, we could begin to

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subtly change the dynamics of how we reconcile grief as a culture from generation to generation. Instead of medicating our griever, therefore numbing them into coping, we instead could empower them with real skills, communities, mentors, resources and tools to naturally build their own God-given resilience. People helping people for the good of all, not people helping people for the wealth and power to control a market.

In order to make this possible, though, we'll need an intervention. "The key elements for effective interventions 1) Group based activities, 2) Targeted groups (women vs. men), 3) Include older widows/ widowers in development, implementation, and evaluation of programs, 4) Tailor to individual needs, 5) Provide training and support for facilitators, and 6) Use community resources and build community capacity" (Cattan & White, 1998).

Yet not all widows are older. Younger widows are in the active building stages of adulthood along with equally being thrust into this new developmental stage. They attend college, have careers, childrearing and in disbelief that life has not proceeded as strategically and chronologically planned. Older widows may be more aware that death will come (and has to many friends around them), but this does not negate the need for support or compassion in society. Robert Neimeyer, Ph.D., wrote an article titled "*Traumatic Loss and the Reconstruction of Meaning*" where he admits humans are very adaptive but also says,

"The emotional impact of such losses can be compounded by the misunderstanding, blame, or simple inattention of other people in institutional care settings, the family, workplace or community, adding a burden of private anguish, secrecy, or shame for

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those whose mourning is “hurried up”, disallowing, trivialized, or unrecognized by those around them” and “The loss of an intimate attachment relationship through death- poses profound challenges to our adaptation as living beings”.

If we don't develop these widowed programs, it seems we must accept, as a society, the responsibility for exponentially exasperating grief, often without knowing we are doing so. Raising awareness for widow causes could resolve this issue.

One of the most profound findings in Robert Neimeyer's work is his acknowledgment for our human need to create 'meaning' from our losses. He talked about the 'master narrative' (the conversations we have with ourselves) and the 'assumptive world' (what we think should be happening in our life) affects our healing processes negatively or positively in widowhood (Neimeyer). When one cannot find solutions from their own bank of memory, the need to connect outside oneself becomes even more vital to surviving the psychological and physiological effects of widowhood.

But there has to be a way to do widowhood better without all the intense loneliness, suffering and confusion associated with it. I found in *“Making Meaning out of Loss: A Story and Study of Young Widowhood”*, that it's vitally important to find creative ways to express oneself to prevent a griever from feeling isolated and lonely. Especially so when, the Hebrew origin of the word 'widow' means 'voiceless' and 'destitute', so this makes sense. It is no wonder that generations upon generations still see widows as desperate, helpless and those to pity. No one wants this. The avenues in which many women use to seek reconciliation from these images and for themselves are through writing, blogging, group discussions, scrapbooking, framing photos, writing poems, volunteering and

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making gifts for others- anything that motivates them to share their story creatively with others.

Storytelling is an effective modality to empowering widows. Opening up to dialogs about the past, present and future are equally relevant. In the wake of loss, it is becoming more vital for millions of women worldwide to connect with other widows who have found new meaning and to ask, ‘How did you do it?’ Learning how another person found success in the past, in the present and how they hope to in the future is a gift.

Truly, it becomes an urgent pursuit when a widow’s needs are not met. Imagine half of the world’s widows on the streets and homeless, unproductive and broken. At the same time, imagine the world’s widows empowered using their voices to vote and change policy in Washington D.C. and beyond. The stark contrast and yet, the possibility for either isn’t far from the truth. Right now, which way it will go is as clear as ‘flipping a coin’. Where widows are concerned, we are in defining moment in history. Her basic needs must be met first, then secondly, move towards recreating her identity with meaning and purpose to release her potential to make a positive difference in the world.

If all people have a purpose in life, in every stage of life, (and I believe they do) then failing to uplift and empower a subculture of women during their most challenging of times is an epic fail for humanity. I admire that Robert Byrne saying,

“The purpose of life is a life of purpose” (Byrne).

It speaks beautifully to this point. Leaving these women to fend for themselves in the sidelines of life vs. participating in our thriving communities is a waste of extraordinary

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human potential and purpose.

With so many women facing widowhood currently and in their future, isn't it time we changed the face of widowhood to be seen for what it is, a normal life stage with difficult obstacles yet unlimited possibilities. Possible first steps toward program development could contain the foundational bricks of developing education, raising funds, analyzing studies, investing in research, encouraging meaning making, building strong and close communities and enabling resilient mentors.

Implementing these by training and educating tenured and willing widows in a community setting with a focus on mentoring and great leadership could create significant movement for empowering widows as a first step, a small push forward to change the face of widowhood as we know it today. Imagine if 1% of global widows were given this opportunity. Around 2.58 million widows would find light in their darkest moments. One is a powerful number. Compassionate efforts such as these are fierce and memorable, the perfect way to create a purposeful legacy from loss. Mentoring is a gift that can be passed on and always renewed. Are we not missing out on this renewal resource in the world today?

Although many traditional mentoring programs have proven to be very highly successful in corporate settings and with large organizations such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, The Mentoring Project who serve fatherless kids among others, there has never been a defined or focused effort on the potential impact of developing a mentoring program for widows. It's time for this to change to benefit both widows and society.

We all love a good comeback story, and from the evidence found, widows have

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the innate potential to make this happen if they are shown compassion and given advanced and accessible resources like supportive communities and positive mentors because without programs, communities and people who care, a widow will continue to feel lost, invisible and forgotten, and in a way, she is at the moment. Repeating history or leaving this current situation to resolve itself is not the solution for widow awareness or the advancement of women.

With so many widows and so much opportunity to succeed, it makes sense that more studies, research and evidence in the hands of those able to develop these empowerment programs would benefit many cultures around the world. If anything, I hope my own life serves as a small example of how powerful finding a community and mentor can be for a young widow who found herself with feelings of hopelessness, yet instead, turned into one empowered, hopeful 'change agent'. This positive impact is what every widow deserves.

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