**The Elpis Student Support Programme (ESSP)**

1. Initiative Name: The Elpis Student Support Programme (ESSP)

2. Parent Organization: Elpis Initiative Uganda

3. Core Funding Source: The Elpis Partnership Program Fund

4. Thematic Link: Mitigating HIV risk and mental health crises among university students by addressing a key underlying cause: financial distress.

**1. Introduction & Background.**

Elpis Initiative Uganda is traditionally known for its work in HIV prevention awareness and mental health advocacy. Through our outreach, we have identified a critical, intersecting challenge: a significant number of university students in Uganda are at high risk of dropping out due to acute financial constraints. This financial pressure often leads to severe mental health struggles (anxiety, depression, despair) and can force students into risky behaviors (such as transactional sex) that increase their vulnerability to HIV infection. The ESSP is designed to break this cycle by providing targeted financial support, thereby safeguarding both the educational prospects and the overall well-being of students.

**2. The Problem Statement.**

The pursuit of higher education in Uganda is frequently hampered by tuition and living expense challenges. Many students face:

\* Incomplete Tuition Fees: Inability to pay full tuition fees by university deadlines, leading to suspension of studies.

\* Unmet Basic Needs: Inadequate funds for essential needs like accommodation, food, and academic materials, which severely impacts their ability to focus on studies.

\* Mental Health Strain: Constant financial anxiety is a major contributor to poor mental health, leading to decreased academic performance and social withdrawal.

\* Increased HIV Vulnerability: Desperation for financial survival can push students towards risky sexual behaviours, undermining national HIV prevention efforts.

**3. Programme Goal.**

To improve educational outcomes, mental wellness, and HIV prevention among university students by providing partial financial support for tuition and living expenses, enabling them to continue their studies with dignity and security.

**4. Programme Objectives.**

\* To provide a partial top-up grant to selected students to help them clear their tuition fee balances.

\* To offer limited support for critical living expenses (e.g., accommodation) to reduce financial strain.

\* To reduce the incidence of mental health challenges linked to financial distress among beneficiary students.

\* To indirectly contribute to HIV prevention by reducing the economic pressures that can lead to high-risk behaviours.

\* To foster a sense of hope and opportunity ("Elpis") among the youth in Uganda.

**5. Target Beneficiaries.**

\* Needy and academically dedicated undergraduate students at accredited universities in Uganda.

\* Students demonstrating genuine financial hardship and a clear risk of discontinuing their studies.

\* Students who may already be engaged in or are vulnerable to situations that pose a risk to their mental health or sexual health.

**6. The Intervention: The Elpis Top-Up Model.**

The ESSP is not a scholarship programme. It is a strategic intervention designed to bridge critical financial gaps. Our model is defined by:

\* Partial Financial Support: The initiative will cover a percentage of the outstanding tuition balance or a specific, predetermined amount towards it. This "top-up" model allows our limited funds to have a wider impact, helping more students.

\* Living Expenses Support: Limited grants may be provided for essential living costs, awarded based on need and available funds.

\* Direct Payment: All financial support will be paid directly to the university (for tuition) or to verified service providers (e.g., hostel landlords, bookshops) to ensure transparency and proper use of funds.

\* Mentorship & Guidance: Beneficiaries will have access to voluntary mentorship and guidance sessions on financial literacy, mental health, and HIV prevention, creating a holistic support system.

**7. Funding Structure.**

The programme is funded by generous donations from the Elpis Partnership Program Fund, where partners and donors contribute towards our dual mission of fighting HIV and promoting mental wellness. The ESSP is a strategic extension of this mission, addressing a root cause of both issues.

**8. Expected Outcomes.**

\* Increased university retention and completion rates among beneficiary students.

\* Improved mental well-being and reduced stress levels among supported students.

\* Strengthened resilience against HIV risk factors linked to poverty.

\* Development of a cohort of young graduates who can become empowered contributors to society.

\* Enhanced visibility and impact of the Elpis Initiative Uganda’s holistic approach to health and development.

The Elpis Student Support Programme represents a proactive and impactful investment in the future of Uganda's youth. By alleviating the debilitating stress of financial insecurity, we do more than just keep students in school; we protect their mental health, empower them to make safer life choices, and nurture them to become healthy, productive leaders of tomorrow. As you are led, support the cause.