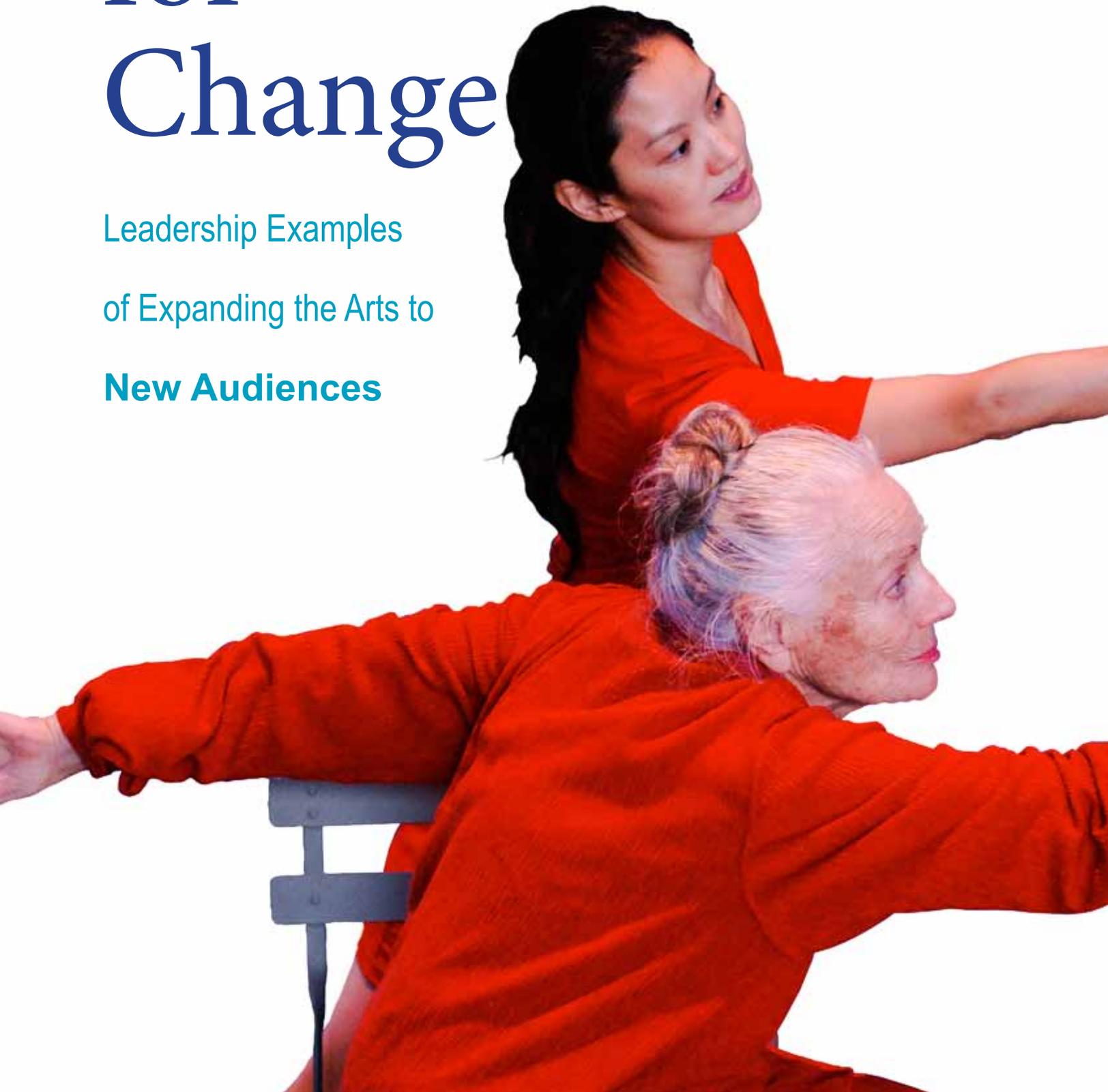


Stories for Change

Partners for Livable Communities
Funded by **MetLife Foundation**

Leadership Examples
of Expanding the Arts to
New Audiences



Nonprofit Organization: *Circle of Care*

Location • Boulder, Colorado

Serving • Older Adults

Web • www.circleofcareproject.org

Circle of Care founder, Joan Raderman, of Boulder, Colorado, wanted to end the isolation of vulnerable elderly in her community, and she wondered if the arts could play a role. In 2004, Raderman, an administrator at a senior facility, was deeply saddened by the current model of senior living. Many older adults were completely separated from the neighborhood and its resources and were viewed as a burden, rather than as an asset.



A volunteer and senior who are "Study Buddies" participating in the "Senior Audit Partners Program" which connects seniors with volunteers who take them to University of Colorado classes. Both get to audit the class at no cost. Courtesy of Circle of Care

"No matter what I did to make it better on the inside, no matter how many plants, guests, or good food I brought in, [the seniors] still rarely got to experience the sights, sounds, tastes and smell of the outside world, and something slowly changed in them. They shut down," she says. Raderman decided to use arts and culture as tools for integrating older adults into the community. An intergenerational, elder life-enrichment program committed to making a positive impact on aging through the arts, Circle of Care is the first program of its kind in the country. Circle of Care serves seniors who are 65 and older living in Section 8 housing, or are homebound, as well as residents of senior facilities or in assisted living. Many have physical, cognitive, and financial challenges.

The original design model, now called *Access to the Arts for Elders*, was a volunteer transportation program. Volunteers would meet seniors at their homes or senior facilities, and both would receive free tickets to attend a high-caliber arts and cultural performance in the area. In its pilot year, Circle of Care served 400 senior residents. It has since become a permanent, city-funded initiative serving 1,200 Boulder County senior residents and engaging more than 2,500 registered volunteers annually. Circle of Care originally attracted volunteers through an attention-grabbing *Senior Idol*, a show that provides a showcase for senior talent. Once volunteers are recruited, they register for mandatory driver training, in partnership with the Denver Regional Mobility and Access Council, and are trained by Circle of Care on the best ways to accommodate and transport older adults.

Raderman scoured the community to find permanent arts and cultural partners. Circle of Care's first partner was the Colorado Music Festival, which wanted to draw hundreds more to its music concerts. Recognizing an opportunity, and with the mantra that, "Every seat filled can change a life," Raderman accepted

600 free tickets to the Festival in exchange for filling the seats. Raderman filled the seats in six weeks. The Colorado Shakespeare Festival then agreed to become a partner, and today the Circle of Care *Cultural Partners* network has grown to include more than 50 local arts organizations, with even more in the queue. Arts organizations realized that donating tickets benefitted them, and offered a brand-new model of audience development that promised the possibility of continued exponential growth. Today, *Access to the Arts for Elders* remains the Circle of Care's largest program. Over \$650,000 of annual in-kind ticket donations are assigned to Boulder County senior citizens and the volunteers.

Another program, *Senior Audit Partners*, was borne from a commitment to making lifelong learning accessible to all older adults interested in an intergenerational academic experience. The University of Colorado became the first partner, and while it already offered seniors the privilege of auditing classes,

barriers prevented many older adults from participating. Volunteers soon became “study buddies,” helping older adults manage their books and class registration, and in exchange received free enrollment to audit college courses. Today, *Senior Audit Partners* continues to grow.



Circle of Care's *Library Access Partners* is a collaboration with

the Boulder Public Library and trains Circle of Care volunteers to improve the access of older adults to library events



Top: Circle of Care volunteers, Denise, Russ and Scott help seniors off a handicap accessible bus to go to the Colorado Music Festival.

Bottom: Making connections.

Courtesy of Circle of Care.

“Thousands of older adults all over the country struggle with social isolation from the very communities to which they devoted their lives. They contributed to our society, raising their children, working, building our towns and cities, and giving their time to create what we benefit from today. Numerous losses, whether it be family, friends, health, or finances, cause older adults to slowly withdraw from



Seniors waiting for volunteer drivers to arrive on their way to a concert, in front of the senior residence Golden West. Courtesy of Circle of Care.

the world. We have a responsibility to them—our mothers, fathers, teachers and mentors, and to ourselves, to create a new culture for aging: an inclusive, caring community for all of us at every stage of our lives. Circle of Care: for them today, for you tomorrow.”

—Joan Raderman, Founder, Circle of Care

and resources. This program gives special attention to seniors with disabilities and mobility challenges. *Elder Adventurers* enables older adults with limited access or mobility to enjoy the great outdoors and partake in education about nature. Raderman asked older adults, “What would you most want if mobility barriers were removed?” Many responded that they would “want to be back in nature, to be in the sun, and to be with people.” *Elder Adventurers*, through a partnership with parks and open-space organizations, provides recreation opportunities as appealing as a picnic in the park or garden, and is highly valued by older adults in the program.

Circle of Care’s large group of volunteers, ranging in ages from six to 98 years old, span the generations. When volunteers attend performances of arts organizations with older adults, they become arts ambassadors, sharing their good experiences and the quality of programs with friends, family, and neighbors. Volunteers are known as “cultural companions,” and the volunteer and older adult duo become part of the wave of intergenerational relationships emerging across the city. Many of the baby boomer volunteers who participate give their time in exchange for free concert tickets and a chance to get to know their elders, but they also want to ensure such services are available when they are older.

Raderman states that the organization’s biggest challenges include the ability to attract sufficient resources to meet the constantly increasing demand. She notes that it is unusual for a board, not having precedents to guide it, to be required to manage innovation while overseeing development. There is a learning curve. Raderman also notes that acquiring more resources would allow for new experiments in finding ways to connect people, with minimal cost and in a sustainable way.

The Circle of Care model can be replicated in communities across the country. For successful collaborations, it is essential to identify community amenities and resources and mobilize them. Raderman explains about her experience: “Every time we attend an event with older adults en masse, it is almost like an art installation. There is a reaction from the patrons, watching and wondering why and how all of the seniors arrived. We enjoy making the unexpected happen, and the success of what we do is in our consistency and delivering what we say we will.” ■



Circle of Care ladies, before the concert, having a picnic. Courtesy of Circle of Care.