



ARTFUL AGING

How Creativity Sparks Vitality
and Transforms Lives

Edited by Heidi Raschke



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: The Times They Are a Changin'—Artfully by Heidi Raschke

Chapter 1: More Creative With Age, Not Less by Chris Farrell

Chapter 2: The Right Venue by Linda Bernstein

Chapter 3: The Thrill of the Spotlight by Richard Chin

Chapter 4: The Museum That's Redefining Aging by Linda Bernstein

Chapter 5: Helping the Homebound Connect by Beth Baker

Chapter 6: Fighting Ageism With Art by Linda Bernstein

Chapter 7: Band Camp for Grownups by Linda Bernstein

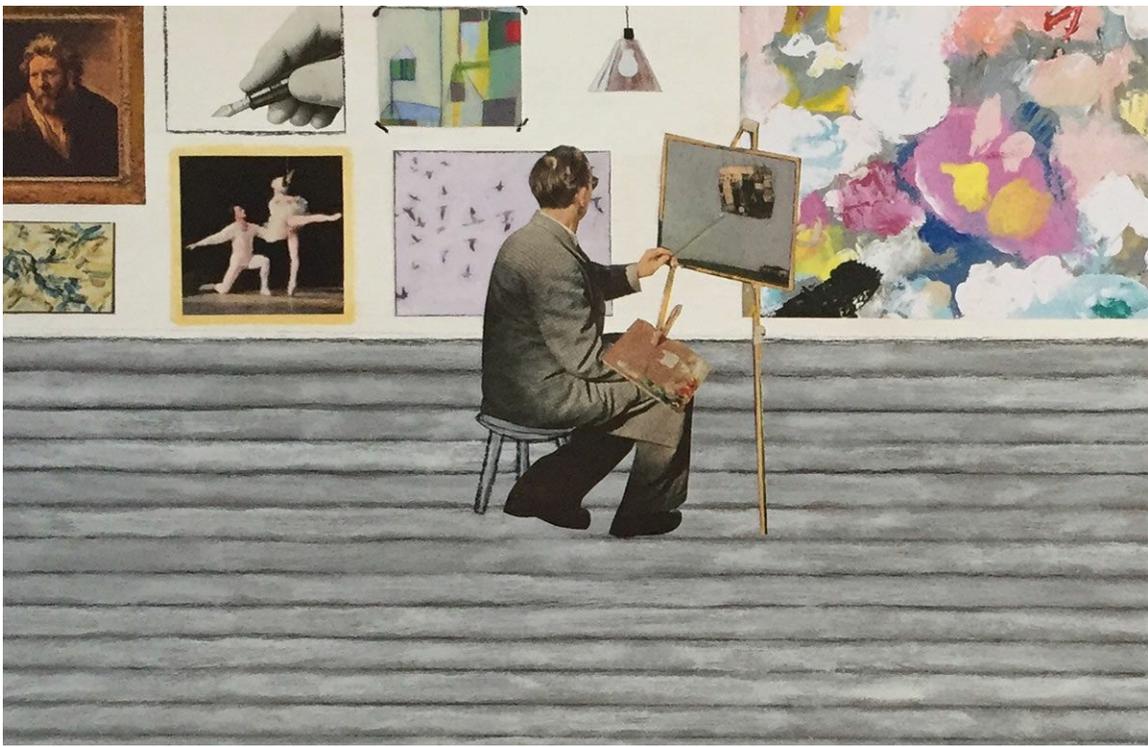
Chapter 8: The Case for Arts-Based Communities by Suzanne Gerber

Appendix: A Call to Action

INTRODUCTION



THE TIMES THEY ARE A CHANGIN'—ARTFULLY *BY HEIDI RASCHKE*



“Artful Aging,” painting and collage by Megan Jackson.

“There’s a line I’ve stolen from Hamilton. This is not a moment; this is a movement.”
—*Ellen Michelson*

In the 1960s baby boomers changed the world by transforming youth culture. Now they’re set to do it again by transforming the culture of aging.

Philanthropists, scientists, artists and entrepreneurs are redefining what it means to grow old in America, and many of them see arts as a powerful tool to accomplish that goal.

“I believe very strongly that participation in the arts is important throughout life,” says Ellen Michelson, founder and president of [Aroha Philanthropies](#). Her organization hosted a convening last fall in Minneapolis on the topic “Artful Aging: The Transformative Power of Creativity.”

“There’s a line I’ve stolen from *Hamilton*,” Michelson says, quoting the hit Broadway musical. “This is not a moment; this is a movement.”

As artful aging advocates shared insights on the role of arts participation to spark joy and

vitality in older adults, it truly did feel like a revolution was under way. And the experience of participants in the event as well as others who work with older adults shows that demand and interest in artful aging is growing.

Janet Brown, president of [Grantmakers in the Arts](#), a national association of funders, says her organization has seen a groundswell in interest for creative aging programs during the past five years.

“Two things that are hard to quantify are happening quietly,” she says. “Baby boomers are involving themselves in activities they did in high school, and the current generation will not tolerate the kinds of facilities we have now.”

These factors, she says, are going to further drive demand for arts programs and new approaches to housing for older adults.

In addition, using arts as a tool in health care is gaining momentum for patients, caregivers and doctors, she says. “Science tells us that this kind of programming will keep people healthier.”

Julene Johnson is spearheading what is believed to be the largest scientific study in the world on the health benefits of participation in an arts program. An expert in music and social neuroscience and the associate director at the University of California, San Francisco’s Institute for Health & Aging, Johnson says what makes the arts so powerful is that they have the ingredients for:

- Challenging the mind and body
- Creating a deep level of engagement
- Offering a way to express and share culture
- Allowing for emotional expression
- Providing the opportunity to create beauty

Her [Community of Voices](#) study of more than 400 diverse adults hypothesizes what smaller studies have hinted at: that participation in community choirs reduces the risk of poor health outcomes. Results are expected in fall 2016.

The arts are accessible, relatively inexpensive to deliver, reach people of different socioeconomic and racial and ethnic backgrounds and can help vulnerable adults to age in a creative and graceful way, Johnson says. “We need more creative ways to improve the quality of aging.”

It’s not going to happen overnight, of course. Thirty years ago, Michelson points out, exercise equipment wasn’t common in residences for older adults. Now it’s a no-brainer. People demanded it and the culture changed.

That’s starting to happen with artful aging.

“It takes a mind change. That’s all,” Brown says. “It’s going to happen because it’s low-hanging fruit and the demo is going to insist on it.”

CHAPTER 1



MORE CREATIVE WITH AGE, NOT LESS *BY CHRIS FARRELL*



Folksinger Charlie Maguire writes songs with adult day care clients.

*“The elders are at the top of their creativity. It blows me away.”
—Food4Thot*

Charlie Maguire is a professional folksinger in his 60s, sitting around a table with 15 other older adults, some in wheelchairs, in a common room for the adult day care facility at Ecumen Parmlly LifePointes in Chisago City, Minn. They are writing a song:

*Pour me another cup of coffee
Make it as strong as it can be
Because I have a lot of things on my mind
So pour one for you and one for me....*

Maguire strums his guitar and blows on his harmonica, stopping to talk about the weather, trips in an RV, reel to reel tapes, a mix of song and conversation that inspires Ray, George, Nancy, Joan

and others to contribute lyrics captured on a large flip chart.

The last stanza comes together.

...Keep that coffee pot handy

And the milk and sugar for the crew

So we can talk together

And we can listen, too.

What's happening in this sunlit room in rural Minnesota is a small example of a much larger social shift gaining traction: Increasingly, people are pointing out ridiculousness of the stereotype is that older people aren't "creative." It's just plain wrong. Deeply wrong.

In fact, many experts and teachers say that creativity increases with age.

Perhaps the most striking illustration of this is in the low-income art colonies built by Tim Carpenter, founder of [EngAGE](#). Carpenter worked in senior health care early in his career and became disillusioned with the medical approach to aging, which treats it as a disease. He was horrified watching residents at senior centers gluing Popsicle sticks during arts and crafts period. "Getting older is actually a good thing," Carpenter says. "But what I saw was pathetic."

There had to be a better way, he thought.

So Carpenter joined forces with John Huskey, chief executive of Mata Housing, and developed the Burbank Senior Artists Colony in Burbank, Calif. The affordable, 200-person senior complex is designed for encouraging residents' participation in the arts. "Create a space for people to take risks, stretch and use their creativity," Carpenter says.

Professionals teach the residents classes in theater, painting, screenplay writing, storytelling and other arts on a semester system with the expectation that the low-income seniors will learn a craft and produce art.

Among those instructors is Oshea Luja, also known as poet Food4Thot, who teaches creative expression, spoken word, poetry and rap at charter schools in the Los Angeles area and offers a similar curriculum at the Burbank Senior Arts Colony. Here, his students range from age 75 to 95. They call themselves Oshea's OWLs, for "Old White Ladies," he laughs.

"The elders are at the top of their creativity," says Food4Thot. "It blows me away."

Building on Burbank's success, Carpenter has established 37 communities mostly in southern California. The model is now expanding into Minneapolis, Minn., Portland, Ore. and Winston-Salem, N.C.

The bonuses of becoming creative in your 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s—with help from pros—show up in measured health benefits, including fewer heart problems and less depression. An April 2015 Mayo Clinic study found that making art is tied to fewer cognitive problems as people age.

“Creativity is good for your health,” says Jim Tift, a gerontologist at St. Catherine’s University in St. Paul, Minn.

Another bonus from this trend: new, income-generating businesses for professional artists who are often in their 60s or older, too.

Senior centers, state arts grants, nonprofit arts groups, foundations and other creative-minded organizations these days are frequently paying older artists to teach in communities for older adults. These performers and craftsmen and women tend to cobble together a living through a variety of gigs.

Take Maguire, who has appeared on *Prairie Home Companion*. He tours and sings in libraries, schools and other settings. An agent at a local nonprofit books his songwriting workshops at senior centers.

Similarly, Iris Shiraishi is a classically trained musician, music therapist and composer in her 60s who teaches Taiko drumming to older adults. Shiraishi has also formed a Taiko ensemble with friends, which allows her to compose and experiment with the art form.

“As you get older you really start asking the ‘why’, and start prioritizing,” Shiraishi says.

Those who embrace creative aging understand that age is often liberating. As Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote:

*For age is opportunity no less
Than youth itself, though in another dress,
And as the evening twilight fades away
The sky is filled with stars, invisible by day.*

CHAPTER 2



THE RIGHT VENUE *BY LINDA BERNSTEIN*



Tango classes are popular at Brooklyn Public Library in New York.

“In some areas, libraries are the only cultural institution.”
—Maura O’Malley

Six words sum it up: The arts are good for you.

Those in the field of creative aging know this. The research of the late psychiatrist Dr. Gene Cohen demonstrated the positive impact cultural programs have on our intellectual, emotional and even physical health as we age. And anecdotal evidence about the power of engaging in a creative endeavor to spark vitality and joy later in life abounds.

But when Maura O’Malley and Ed Friedman went looking for programs, they came up short.

“My career had been in arts education, and Ed and I both had become involved in caregiving. We looked around at programs available for older adults, and frankly it was pitiable,” O’Malley remembers.

She and Friedman decided they had to do something, something big and accessible that could be replicated in all sorts of communities around the country. They founded [Lifetime Arts](#), a nonprofit

arts service organization, in 2006, with the idea of using libraries to provide arts programs for adults 55 and older.

“In some areas, libraries are the only cultural institution,” O’Malley says.

It was genius. However, library systems are complex. Sometimes it isn’t even clear whom a grant-giving nonprofit would approach about bringing arts programs for older adults into the building. In 2009, Lifetime Arts had made headway enough to re-grant money it had received to a library in Westchester, N.Y., that would host a skills-based arts program aimed at older adults.

Today, Lifetime Arts has involved 20 major library programs. Each class is taught by a recognized teaching artist, runs for eight sessions and ends with a culminating event, such as an exhibition or performance. Along the way, people taking the classes make friends and learn something new.

“People show up at these library programs with no prior experience in the arts, but they create communities in these libraries,” O’Malley says. “The artists give people tools and time to try new things. People who have never sung, danced or taken a digital photograph learn to do so.”



Before a library receives a grant from Lifetime Arts, the institution must survey its patrons and others in the area to find out what kind of program potential participants would like. In Sunset Park, Brooklyn, N.Y., people wanted to learn to tango.

“We started out with 20 people registered,” says Luz Acevedo, office manager for the Services for Older Adults at the Brooklyn Public Library, “but the turnout weekly is more like 30.”

Teaching artist Walter Perez who hails from Argentina begins each class with a warm-up. People then partner up, and he teaches the steps—no easy feat considering some of the participants use walkers or canes and have balance problems. That’s why some steps are taught with the participants forming a circle to support each other.

“The great thing about Walter is that he engages each person and makes her feel special,” Acevedo says. “If someone doesn’t feel like dancing, Walter speaks with her so she feels more comfortable.”

Some of the people in the class were library regulars; others found out about the program through a senior center or fliers. They were working toward a culminating event in the main dining room of the nearby United Senior Center of Sunset Park — a presentation on the history of the tango along with a demonstration.

Many of the participants, who were as old as 90, discovered a newfound love of Latin dance during the weekly two-hour classes — and some even requested additional training in bachata and merengue.

“This program was so great because people had a chance to use and strengthen their muscles while they were listening to music and performing an art, the tango,” says Acevedo. “One of our main goals, though, was to have the participants engage with each other beyond the classes. That happened, too. I would get exhausted, but these people didn’t want to stop dancing. It is so exciting.”



At the Chandler Downtown Library in Chandler, Ariz., teaching artist, poet and musician William Clipman, teaches a version of his “Myths and Masks” poetry and mask making course to older adults. The class begins by having people fill out a 10-question form to help them discover the “mythic” being inside them.

“Some people answer with a few words; others write five or six pages, but the participants always come up with something that will be the basis of their poem,” Clipman says.

Next, the students create a plastic bandage cast of their faces. “We like this part especially because the people have to team up to do this, and it gets them talking with their fellow classmates,” says adult services librarian Ted Liebler.

The mask, Clipman explains, is a tabula rasa for the mythic being they have discovered through the questionnaire exercise.

“First they paint it, and then they begin decorating the mask with 3D ‘found’ objects, such as feathers, fabric, imitation gems and other items,” Clipman explains. The end product is wearable—and striking to look at.

In their culminating event the students wore their masks and recited their poem in a large new room at the library.

“It’s empowering,” says Liebler. “The people in the workshop go from vision to product.”

Liebler noticed one other by-product of the class that he thinks is priceless: “Laughter in the library,” he says. “That is a great thing to hear.”



“I had an idea in mind for a long time,” says Risa Getman, assistant director of the Hendrick Hudson Free Library in Montrose, N.Y. “In fact, I wasn’t even going to apply for the grant from Lifetime Arts unless they would let me do this program.”

For three years, Hendrick Hudson Free Library has sponsored a play-reading group that meets quarterly; Getman chooses a script and people take parts and read from it.

“I wanted to take this one step further. I wanted people in the group to be able to perform in an actual play,” she says.

An adaptation of Reginald Rose’s classic *12 Angry Men* fit all her requirements. “Most of the action takes place around a table, so that meant people who weren’t particularly mobile could stay seated,” Getman explains. And in real jury rooms, jurors have notebooks in front of them, which meant that the participants could rely on their scripts and not have to worry about memorizing lines.

And to deal with the issue that many of those who signed up were women? Getman changed the title to *12 Angry Jurors*.

Getman had promised that everyone who signed up would get a part. She started out with 13 people (12 jurors and the guard). When others wanted to join in, Getman turned them into understudies.

Getman credits teaching artist Mary Crescenzo for her flexibility working with the group. “There were times when she didn’t know how they would deal with certain aspects of the performance, and she was open to suggestions from the actors,” Getman says.

The culminating event was a terrific success. About 90 people attended the performance, which was followed by a reception. And talk about long-tail effects: One of the actors had connections with the Veterans Administration hospital in the area, and the group went there to do another performance.

“It pushed people beyond their comfort zone, and that they succeeded was a huge morale boost,” Getman says. The actors also forged a strong community.

“They started going out to lunch together. At the end of the workshop, they decided they wanted to have a cast party. The library couldn’t fund that, but the actors didn’t care. They put together a committee and did it themselves,” Getman says. “All the library provided for them was the space.

CHAPTER 3



THE THRILL OF THE SPOTLIGHT *BY RICHARD CHIN*



Ageism flies out the window at an intergenerational Peter Pan rehearsal.

*“The health benefits that come from applause, I often say, are better than a trip to the doctor.”
—Bonnie Vorenberg*

Job one was choosing a play—one that would make sense for high school students and residents at a senior living facility to produce together. The youngest person in the room was 16; the oldest was 101. They decided to tell a story that had been around longer than anyone there.

Peter Pan, it turned out, was 111. J.M. Barrie’s play about an ageless flying boy premiered in 1904. The residents of Episcopal Homes in St. Paul, Minn., and students at Saint Paul Conservatory for Performing Artists had their show.

Their adaption of *Peter Pan* fully integrated the two generations as acting colleagues. A student played Peter Pan; a senior living resident was cast as Tinker Bell. An older actor played Captain Hook; a teenager was cast as his lackey, Smee. Age played a role in some casting decisions: high schoolers played Lost Boys who stayed in Neverland and never grew up, while older actors played

Lost Boys who had left Neverland and grown older.

Or as the notes used to develop the script put it: “We were all at Neverland together—the seniors were the ones who had left—really we are all the same age. Growing up in your heart vs. body. [Captain] Hook represents boredom or fear of getting older.”

In the end, their intergenerational theater production—performed in 2015 at Episcopal Homes—had the young-faced Lost Boys on a mission to defeat Captain Hook and rescue their older-looking friends, restore their lost youth and teach them to fly again.

Joey Clark, chair of the musical theater program at the public charter arts high school, said he was inspired to create an intergenerational theater experience by other theater programs for older adults that have been springing up across the country.

In 1997, there were about 100 theater companies for older adults; today there are nearly 800, says Bonnie Vorenberg, president of ArtAge’s [Senior Theatre Resource Center](#).

“Seniors are largely invisible. The theater gives them a voice,” she says. “The health benefits that come from applause, I often say, are better than a trip to the doctor.”

Research points to other benefits as well.

For two decades, Helga and Tony Noice, husband and wife faculty members of Chicago-area [Elmhurst College](#), have conducted research showing that theater arts enhances healthy cognitive aging. Tony, a professional actor who teaches theater at the college, says the work he has done with his wife, a psychology professor, shows that getting older people to act improves cognitive skills like problem solving and word memory and indicates that the beneficial effect of acting on the brain seem to be stronger than participating in other creative activities, such as singing or visual arts.

He believes that’s because acting stimulates physical, emotional and mental abilities at the same time and because it requires memory recall, yet staying in the present moment.

“It taps your analytic ability, as well as your intuitive ability, as well as your kinesthetic ability,” says Gay Hanna, executive director of the [National Center for Creative Aging](#). In addition, many people feel more comfortable in the spotlight later in life, Hanna says. “Older people are more likely to have the psychological perspective to think ‘If not now, when?’ and ‘What can they do to me?’” she adds.

“I had to wait to be 85 to be an actor,” says Doris Douglas, a *Peter Pan* cast member. “It shows me I’m still learning. I’m not too old to learn.”

Clark’s class is different from a lot of programs for older adults because of the intergenerational component. And in this case, the students in the class were veteran actors, but many of the older performers, like Douglas, had never acted before.

“It’s scary because it’s outside my comfort zone,” said Marijo Hickok, 78. “I’m finding out I can do some things I didn’t think I wanted to do.”

Over the course of three months, the class progressed from acting exercises, improv activities and memory work to writing a play together, rehearsals and a performance before an audience.

Ranging in age from late 70s to over 100, the older actors had a range of physical and cognitive abilities. And there were some bloopers during rehearsals. Like the time Douglas forgot what her role was. “I am ... what am I?” she asked. “You’re a pirate,” said Savannah Broadnax, 17.

But despite some memory lapses, Clark says, the novices were up to the challenge. “They’re all aware they’re in a scene. When they’re in Neverland, they’re in Neverland. Nobody says, ‘I’ve got to go to the bathroom,’” Clark says.

Both the teenagers and the older adults came away with a new picture of the other generation.

“I actually didn’t expect how willing the young-at-hearts, as we call them, were to get into the show,” said 18-year-old Reyna Binondo.

“It doesn’t matter how old you are,” echoed her schoolmate Dorine Jenkins. “You can really love theater no matter what.”

Just don’t tell the older actors to “break a leg,” Douglas asks. “Oh, please don’t say that,” she says, “because I might.”

CHAPTER 4



THE MUSEUM THAT'S REDEFINING AGING *BY LINDA BERNSTEIN*



Gallery conversations and studio classes are offered at MoMA.

The Museum of Modern Art has been working with doctors who might prescribe “art” instead of medication for loneliness-induced depression.

The Museum of Modern Art in New York City is famous for its prestigious collection, which includes the painting of melting watches by Salvador Dali, a self-portrait by Frida Kahlo and sculptures by Pierre Huyghe. And lately it’s been creating buzz for what’s happening in a stunning building recently redesigned by Japanese architect, Yoshi Taniguchi—a structure of white concrete and glass that opens onto a “secret” garden hidden among city skyscrapers.

That’s the home base for Prime Time, an extensive new program, first piloted in July 2014, that encourages people age 65 and older to experience art making, gallery conversations and film viewings.

“We want to be a welcoming place—to all people,” says Francesca Rosenberg, director of community access and programming at MoMA. “And the research we have seen on aging proves that art viewed or created in a social atmosphere stimulates the mind, and that participation in programs that involve art learning create joy.”

Before the education staff and curators decided what MoMA would offer to the 65-plus crowd, they created an advisory group (a “collective,” Rosenberg calls it) of older adults with whom they had previously been in contact. The questions on the table centered on what these museumgoers could gain from the museum.

“Discounted admission—although we do offer that—wasn’t enough,” Rosenberg remembers. All museum visitors want a special experience every time they walk through the door, and the demographic MoMA is now committed to serve deserves something unusual that can’t be duplicated anywhere else.

Rosenberg says that MoMA staffers were keenly aware that caregivers would accompany a portion of their targeted group. So, whatever programming they chose would need to take that into account.

“We also wanted to ensure that the offerings included the opportunity for socializing. We want to counteract social isolation that people in this age group sometimes feel,” Rosenberg explains. In fact, MoMA has been working with doctors who might prescribe “art” instead of medication for loneliness-induced depression; the patients can come to the museum to interact with art and with other people.

Because Prime Time wasn’t sure exactly what kinds of classes might be the most popular, the museum staff began by offering a varied menu of experiences. Some involve a lecture and discussion on a well-known artist, such as Degas. Other classes are designed so participants will get their hands “dirty” by creating their own art. Printmaking and photography have been popular, as was one of the initial classes: drawing live models.

Not yet two years into the program, nearly every class now sells out well beforehand, whether it’s a two-hour art-making studio class or a gallery lecture, which can fit 15 to 20 people. “We keep these small so people can have the chance to mingle and talk,” Rosenberg says. Although offerings vary with the time of year, the museum generally schedules two Prime Time programs a month.

Highly popular are the films, shown in the museum auditorium, which has a capacity of 125. At the end of the movie, a curator and educator lead discussions that Rosenberg describes as “lively and exciting.” She adds: “Those people who come to the film programs are real film buffs. They’re knowledgeable, and they have opinions.”

Many participants, in fact, say that the Prime Time programs have “opened” them up and provided new experiences.

“I felt that people appreciated my comments and agreed with me in many instances. That gave me confidence to continue to participate. In other words, I came out of my shell. I felt connected to the art more than before. I have been visiting the museum for forty years and felt more at ease with the art and the artists,” says Esther Hernandez, a Prime Time participant.

Prime Time is grateful that so many of those who have taken classes are museum members. But to fulfill their mission, the program’s team members are reaching to go beyond those people and find

others who might not otherwise know about the offerings. They have worked with a few senior centers, and now are trying to make contacts through physicians who treat older patients and with the New York City Department for the Aging.

“We want to get people who haven’t been involved with museums before. We know that there are people who would be interested in art classes, but up until this point in their lives they haven’t had time. We’re doing marketing and research to find them, because once we have them here, they’ll be hooked,” says Rosenberg.

Evidently, she’s right. Already, in less than two years, Prime Time has brought in 5,000 people, a number the program leaders hope to grow following its May 2016 summit on ways cultural institutions can serve older adults. The museum has also gone beyond the physical classroom and into the digital world with an online studio class. “It’s kind of like a Google Hangout, and it’s a way to get to people who can’t come to the museum,” says Rosenberg. Also in the works is a “summer camp,” where people will come to the museum for several days in a row for their class.

Rosenberg notes that when a group of museum staffers was asked to look back at the last year and think of what MoMA had accomplished, many mentioned Prime Time. “We have embedded the notion that accessibility for older adults is a priority. It’s not just the purview of one department, but everybody’s job,” she says.

CHAPTER 5



HELPING THE HOMEBOUND CONNECT *BY BETH BAKER*



The Virtual Senior Center offers online classes—and lively discussions.

*“You don’t feel like you are isolated. I have my family, but still I have to spend a lot of time by myself.”
—Amanda Fajardo*

Rose Binder, 93, of Queens, N.Y., is homebound. She has no stores in her neighborhood, and taking an accessible taxi service makes her “very nervous,” she says. “Sometimes they come late or they don’t show up and I have to keep calling.” Even speaking on the telephone is difficult for her.

For many people in her position, life would be lonely and isolating. But thanks to something called a Virtual Senior Center, operated by the nonprofit Selfhelp Community Services, Binder’s time is filled with intellectual and cultural riches. Moreover, she has the chance to make friends and to regularly chat with them face-to-face—all from the comfort of her home.

Each week, the Virtual Senior Center offers some 30 online classes to homebound clients, from tai chi and exercise to contemporary history discussions and gallery talks with museum curators, as well as music appreciation and singing—even Mandarin. Participants use a simple touch-screen

computer to join in, as well as to Skype, play games or use the Internet.

Selfhelp partnered with Microsoft and the City of New York to develop the center. “The whole point is to marry technology with homebound seniors, to alleviate loneliness and depression,” explains Carmella Chessen, Selfhelp’s outreach and volunteer coordinator. “We want them to join four classes a week as a minimum. They have to want to be social and to learn the computer.” They also cannot have cognitive issues, she adds.

The program serves more than 200 people, with an average age of mid-80s, although one participant is 100. More than half are in New York, with others connected through partner organizations in Chicago and Baltimore.

“I especially like any classes that give you information like history, art or museums, so I try to do as many as I can,” says Binder. “But unfortunately I have to eat lunch and I skip something. Where else can you get such a wonderful array of classes without going to class?”

Another participant, Amanda Fajardo, 83, especially enjoys the music classes and the opera. “We always learn something new,” she says.

Fajardo became involved with the Virtual Senior Center after her husband died two years ago. “I was alone and they offered me the program and they helped me a lot,” she says. “You have company and you don’t feel like you are isolated. I have my family, but still I have to spend a lot of time by myself.”

Research has found that loneliness contributes to many physical ills, among them heart disease, poor immunity and Alzheimer’s. To help counter loneliness, the Virtual Senior Center is all about participation and relationships. Unlike other distance learning where people often sit anonymously at their computer screens, participants engage here not only with the instructor but also with each other, and friendships form.

“I was interested in duplicating the experience you have when you attend a gallery talk,” says instructor Nelly Silagy Benedek, director of education at The Jewish Museum. “It’s interactive, you make eye contact—with most online learning classes, you lose that. With this, it’s a limited number of students, you can talk with them, you can really get to know them.

Using a video chat system, each participant appears on the screen and conversations are in real time. Participants may choose to mute themselves, be invisible, or click on a big yellow hand icon to be called upon—although people often jump in with comments.

In a recent class, Benedek engaged participants by asking them to compare and contrast pieces of art now showing in an eclectic exhibit at her museum, called *Unorthodox*. She drew their attention to aspects of light, color and composition, soliciting their thoughts.

“I was definitely not sure what to expect at the beginning because I wasn’t sure if I could create that one-on-one connection in a virtual space and I was a little bit concerned I’d just be lecturing,” Benedek says. “But they’re very comfortable with each other and with expressing their opinions.”

In one class, Benedek was showing a work of art that depicted a Hasidic Jewish man wearing a

traditional fur hat called a shtreimel. “One gentleman said, ‘just a minute,’ and he came back with an old faded picture of himself as a young man wearing a shtreimel—it was pretty incredible,” she says. “He was able to make that personal connection and share his experience with everybody. The participants often talk about their own personal experiences, which is often touching.”

In addition to The Jewish Museum, Chessen has formed partnerships with The Museum of Modern Art, The New York Historical Society and others to offer high-quality classes.

Joe Margolin, who teaches a lively contemporary history class, says “this is one of the most intellectually challenging activities that I’ve ever done in my life,” because he’s hit with so many interesting viewpoints. “It’s probably one of the things that’s keeping my cerebellum and cerebrum going.”

A recent discussion he led on the history and arcane rules of the political party nominating process was punctuated with laughter. “I’m not exaggerating when I say most of us have become friends,” Margolin said, and then added jokingly: “Janice and I are considering getting engaged.”

“You’re making me jealous,” piped up another woman.

At the end of the class, participants reflected on why they appreciate the Virtual Senior Center. “I’ve never been to college,” Patti, one of the younger students, said. “For me, it’s a great opportunity to learn because many of our participants were there during the Roosevelt years and World War II, so I’ve learned a tremendous amount from people who were eyewitnesses.”

“We all respect each other’s views and opinions,” added James, another participant. “And we care about each other. If someone is absent, we want to know why.”

For these participants, the Virtual Senior Center, supported by grant money, is free. To move toward a more sustainable financial footing and to make the center more widely available, Selfhelp now offers it to others who are homebound, for a fee. Tuition for an unlimited number of classes is \$60 a month, in addition to the computer (\$575), set-up and training and high-speed Internet charges; participants may use their own computer if it has a webcam and meets other specifications. (I was able to sit in on a class using my five-year-old MacBook laptop.)

The Virtual Senior Center is one of many innovative ways that Selfhelp supports the well being of its clients. The organization was established some 80 years ago to assist Nazi holocaust survivors who came to the United States. Thirty years ago, the group expanded its services to low- and moderate-income older adults in New York City and Long Island.

“We believe in independent living with services, if and when [people] need them,” says CEO Stuart C. Kaplan, “so it creates dignity and independence for the individual and keeps the cost of care at a minimal level.” Selfhelp operates six senior centers (in addition to the virtual one), six housing complexes, four naturally occurring retirement communities (NORCs), an Alzheimer’s support program, home care, case management and other services.

In apartment complexes with Selfhelp, health kiosks in the lobbies let residents monitor their vital signs, which helps them better manage chronic conditions, such as high blood pressure.

Residents also use Skype to connect virtually with social workers, who stay on top of their emerging problems. “That contact is much better than a phone call—seeing somebody, how they’re dressed, what their demeanor is,” says Kaplan. Through this technology, residents may be visited weekly, rather than every two or three months.

Fundamental to Selfhelp’s philosophy is that older people need to stay connected to the wider world. “To that end, utilizing our technologies, we work with schools, museums, churches and synagogues and bring all those activities and age groups, to our seniors, if they cannot get there any other way.”

As for the Virtual Senior Center, Kaplan says, “The response has been absolutely remarkable.”

CHAPTER 6



FIGHTING AGEISM WITH ART *BY LINDA BERNSTEIN*



PALETTE participants bridge generations.

“The goal is to eliminate ageism and preconceived notions the participants may have.”
—Sadie Rubin

“Whom would I meet? What would I say? Would I seem dorky?” These were Rena Berlin’s concerns before she met her Partner in Art Learning, the new “pal” she’d been matched with through a program that pairs a college student with an older adult to create art.

“For the first time in my life I really felt like a senior,” says the 68-year-old educator from Richmond, Va., with a laugh. “They were transporting a small group of us from the Weinstein Jewish Community Center in a van to the Visual Arts Center of Richmond. A van. That mean’s you’re getting old. I was also nervous.”

It turns out she had nothing to worry about. “After my PAL and I got started, it was amazing,” she says.

Berlin was recalling her experience with PALETTE, which stands for Promoting Art for Life

Enrichment Through Transgenerational Engagement. It's a big acronym for a program founded by Sadie Rubin that brings together lots of big ideas to fight ageism and promote artful aging.

A social worker by training, Rubin thought her career trajectory would lead to directing a nursing home. Instead, she initiated a series of classes that connect older adults, students and teachers who, together, create art.

“While building PALETTE, I drew from the philosophy of the late psychiatrist Dr. Gene Cohen, who believed that creativity enriches our lives at every stage,” Rubin says.

PALETTE's mission is to connect students with active, older adults and help erase the stereotypes young people may have about aging. The students aren't “helping” the older adults; rather they're working together as peers.

PALETTE's main academic partner is Virginia Commonwealth University. Students from the school's pharmacy, physical therapy, dentistry, social work and dance and choreography departments can earn a credit for signing up to be part of a PAL team. Each cohort involves 20 students, 20 older adults and an instructor. (There have been five cohorts since the inception of PALETTE, which is funded by the Geriatric Training & Education initiative, administered by the Virginia Center on Aging and appropriated by the Virginia General Assembly, in January 2014.)

“The goal is to eliminate ageism and preconceived notions the participants may have,” Rubin explains. That's why the classes are held on “neutral ground.”

Says Rubin: “If the university students were traveling to a senior center, they might think, ‘Oh, I'm going to be with old people,’ and that would put the older and younger participants on uneven ground. Forming true relationships would be more difficult.”

The Visual Arts Center of Richmond provides the space for visual arts classes, which include painting, printmaking, clay and fiber arts. Each pair of PALs is set up next to each other with, for instance, two canvasses and two paint palettes.

“Conversation comes naturally when you're working side-by-side,” Rubin says. “First you talk about what you're doing, and then as you get comfortable, you go on to different, more personal topics.”

Dancing is offered, too. The PALETTE in Motion program operates slightly differently, with two or three students for every older adult.

“In the beginning I had the idea that having more young people around would bolster the sense of the studio being a ‘safe place,’” says Melanie Richards, an associate professor in the school's department of Dance and Choreography and the movement instructor for the PALETTE in Motion classes. “But by the second class, I could tell that the seniors felt no sense of frailty, and the students didn't see their PALs as physically limited either.”

Richards, who is 69 and has been dancing for more than 50 years, found out about the program through an email to faculty and was put in contact with Rubin.

“I was afraid my ideas were kind of ‘innocent,’” Richards remembers. But she discovered she

and Rubin agreed about everything. To begin with, Richards says, she was specific that she wasn't envisioning an exercise program.

"I didn't want the class to be purpose- or task-driven," Richards explains. "I wanted to explore the potential of everyone in the space to have the experience what it was like to choreograph."

In each session, everyone comes in as "equals," Richard says. "With choreography you work with levels, and each makes a statement."

One time, the class explored pulse, concentrating on how pulse creates accents in movement. Another time the students experimented with "nearing." People moved in and out of being a leader of the sculptural formation of the small group of bodies.

"I think my age made the seniors realize that anyone can access motion. It can be within your own capacity. It was less intimidating to them that I wasn't a 30-year-old ballet princess," Richards observes. "People really encountered a situation with no expectations and no judgment."

Because people who are moving around are less likely to have conversations about anything other than what they're doing, Rubin made sure to add a social component at the end of each session. "That helped it become a community," she says.

The PALETTE in Motion classes culminate with a showcase event where the participants demonstrate the movements and "body sculptures" they have made over the weeks. And Richards has more ambitious ideas.

"I'm thinking of group experience where the class would make a folk dance that would include a movement created by each participant. Each day at the end of the session, they would add another movement, and at the end of the semester, the whole community will dance, young and old together," Richards says.

The idea of the students working with older adults remains the foundation of the program, and Rubin says it's marvelous to watch the various young people who have participated. While Rubin will agree that some young people are more naturally drawn to working with older adults than others, she also sees interest and enthusiasm from a wide swath of the students to whom the program is available.

"When I ask the students why they are enrolling, lately a lot of them are saying, 'My friend says I have to do this,'" Rubin says. "That in itself means that what we are doing with PALETTE is working. It means the young people are interested in being with older adults in a non-traditional way, that they have dropped any preconceived negative constructs about how seniors function in our world."

Matthew Hornsby, a pharmacy student, says he enjoyed a great connection with his grandparents while growing up, but still had to step outside his comfort zone when signing up for the program. "I was a bit nervous the first day—but then I met my PAL, Rena Berlin, and we're both big talkers, so that helped," Hornsby says.

Hornsby feels that PALETTE has given him valuable insight that he'll use in his career.

“Knowing that age is really nothing, that you can have great friendships regardless of how old you are means that I’ll have a different attitude,” he says. “I’ll know how to listen and how to develop important interactions.”

In turn, being a PAL with Hornsby has changed Berlin’s attitude toward the pharmacists she has always taken for granted. “I can’t believe how much Matthew knows and how hard he is working. Because I met Matthew, I now have no problem asking a pharmacist questions, and that may affect the quality of my life as I get older,” Berlin says.

CHAPTER 7



BAND CAMP FOR GROWNUPS *BY LINDA BERNSTEIN*



A New Horizons Band in Florida at a performance.

*“When you participate in ensemble that is better than you, you aren’t ruining it; you’re contributing to it.”
—Adrienne Greenbaum*

I was scrolling through Facebook the other day when I happened upon a bunch of photos of a friend of mine at . . . band camp?

Wait. Isn’t band camp something that high school kids do? What’s a respectable 50-plusser doing out in the woods with her flute?

“Learning a lot and having a great time” is the short answer. A longer explanation involves the way playing a musical instrument keeps the brain in tune while we age.

“The brain workout when you’re playing music is terrific,” says Roy Ernst, a professor emeritus at Eastman School of Music who had made it his mission to encourage adults to pick up an instrument, even if they have little or no musical background. His New Horizons program aims to make joining a band and even going to band camp accessible for anyone.

“You play three or four notes per second, all the while thinking about pitch, duration, intensity

and context,” Ernst says. “All this has to be processed to the brain and then made artistic. Members of an ensemble are concentrating on things like whether they are in tune with the others. The mind is constantly working at a high speed. People say the when they’re playing music, they don’t think about anything else.”

Ernst began the New Horizons program in Rochester, N.Y., in 1991 in response to seeing his parents and their friends disengage as they aged.

“They didn’t seem to be engaged in the present or future,” Ernst says. He thought it would be great for retired people to play in a band. “When you’re in a band or orchestra, you’re engrossed in the present because you’re playing music right now, and you’re looking toward the future because you have a concert coming up.”

It turns out he was on to something.

“After just two years in Rochester, we knew this was something people all over the place would just love, so I took a two year sabbatical to start 15 more bands,” Ernst says.

There are now more than 200 New Horizons groups in the United States and Canada as well as a New Horizons chorus in Italy and a New Horizons band in Ireland.

The main premise of New Horizons is that people benefit from learning to play an instrument at any age. “It used to be thought that people had to become acquainted with music at an early age in order to be able to become proficient and enjoy participating in a group,” Ernst says. “We now know that isn’t true.”

Bobbie Ferguson Gates is living proof of this assertion. “At age 61, I picked up the flute,” she says. Since then, she’s joined a community band, started mentoring flutists at her grandson’s elementary school and formed her own small flute group. Lately she’s been experimenting with percussion, too. “There are just so many things to play with,” she says. “It’s fun to go crazy.”

The typical New Horizons band attracts three kinds of players. There are those, like Gates, who played an instrument as a kid but haven’t picked it up since; non-professional musicians who may even belong to a community orchestra but want something more; and adults who have never played music and want to give it a try.

Younger people, even high school students, are welcome to join in the fun. But they should be warned, jokes John Cryer, a professor emeritus in the Department of Statistic and Actuarial Science at the University of Iowa: Those youngsters may need to take early retirement to keep up with all New Horizons has to offer.

Cryer had played string bass in jazz groups throughout his adulthood, but he hadn’t touched the euphonium in decades. New Horizons convinced him to give it another go. “It was a real challenge after 45 years,” he says. “In the beginning I was having a hard time, and the group sounded pretty elementary on the whole. Today we sound quite good. We all practice a lot and love it so much.”

Cryer plays in several groups. His primary New Horizons band meets twice a week in a local senior center. Beginners rehearse from 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. The more advanced musicians come in

at 9:30 and stay until 10:30. “Then we stick around for coffee,” he says.

As New Horizons grew, Ernst added camps to the program, so participants could come together for a few days and work with teachers and coaches on college campuses or musical centers, such as Chautauqua, N.Y. and Interlochen, Mich.

At band camp, people can join polka or Klezmer groups, learn a new instrument and stretch their skills by playing in a large ensemble. “In a large ensemble,” says Adrienne Greenbaum, a professor of music at Mt. Holyoke College and a New Horizons band camp instructor, “you can play what you can and don’t play what you can’t. You participate at your level. When you participate in ensemble that is better than you, you aren’t ruining it; you’re contributing to it.”

CHAPTER 8



THE CASE FOR ARTS-BASED COMMUNITIES *BY SUZANNE GERBER*



Jamie Bennett and his colleagues at ArtPlace America promote arts-centered communities.

*“Every single community has people who sing and dance and tell stories.”
—Jamie Bennett*

Even if you’re not familiar with the term “creative placemaking,” you’ve probably seen a lot of it. Think “art in public places” with very specific goals.

For the past decade, creative placemaking has come to describe projects in which “art plays an intentional and integrated role in place-based community planning and development.” That definition is from Jamie Bennett, executive director of [ArtPlace America](#) (APA), a consortium of federal agencies, banks and philanthropic foundations who believe that artists and arts organizations can shape the social, physical and economic characters of their communities.

Putting art at the heart of a community enhances our lives by stirring hard-to-articulate feelings and inspiring us to look beyond what we believe to be possible and imagine a more vibrant, exciting future. It also reminds us that we’re all creative beings—and that whether we’re making art or music, telling stories or cathartically sharing in the experience, we’re all connected.

Since its inception in 2011, ArtPlace America has invested \$85 million in 233 creative

placemaking projects in 154 communities of all sizes across the United States. It will announce recipients of an additional \$10.5 million later this year. Which, when you consider how arts budgets are often the first line item to get slashed from budgets, is pretty impressive.

But unlike that cool mural that local school kids painted on the side of an abandoned lot, creative placemaking has specific goals. Projects must define the community whose lives they seek to enhance, describe the positive change that the group of people wants, clearly outline an arts-based “intervention” to bring about that result and create a method of measuring the change.

While it’s impossible to describe the breadth of projects APA supports, here’s a tiny sample of current ones: Choreographers and dancers are collaborating with the Tacoma Park, Md., Department of Transportation to redesign a streetscape. A visual artist in Ashland, Mass., is planting a polychromatic garden atop an EPA Superfund site to bring visibility to the project while remediating the soil. And in Camden, N.J., artists are creating light-based work to bring residents onto the street at night to help increase public safety.

Jamie Bennett discussed how he got involved in this field, how ArtPlace America is helping unite artists, community planners and communities and why this is such an important initiative:

You’ve said that creative placemaking is “literally ancient.” How so?

In ancient Greece, the theater was the center of the community, as well as the center of government, religion and social life. And it goes back further than that. Our earliest recorded human history is of communities, and their boundaries were sketched out by art.

So in between the ancient Greeks and today’s phrase creative placemaking, what did people call it?

Community arts, asset-based community development... There’s also a school of visual-arts folks who think of it as a social, or civic, practice. Whatever you call it, it’s the same work that comes from a similar impulse. It’s something of a trend, a way of thinking, and is usually associated with cultural affairs, urban planning, public policy—and today it’s a big element of philanthropy.

It’s a cornerstone of urban planning background: How we come together as neighbors to collectively shape the spaces that we inhabit. We’ve just added ‘creative’ to the old tradition of “placemaking” by inviting artists and arts organizations to join their neighbors in doing this.

Why does creative placemaking frequently occur in underserved or marginalized communities?

Because philanthropy and government tend to invest their resources where the market isn’t. By definition, you’re talking about underserved communities, where there’s the greatest need for some kind of intervention.

What in your background prepared you for this job of allotting tens of millions of dollars to deserving communities and artists?

I grew up in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Illinois. And I eventually came to NYC to study theater. I performed a bit, but was more into producing and stage-managing. After college, I landed a job in the alumni office and launched myself in a career of fundraising before moving on to fundraising at The New York Philharmonic and The Museum of Modern Art. One of the museum’s trustees invited

me to work for her foundation, which is when I made the leap to giving away money. I also worked for New York City's Department of Cultural Affairs and the National Endowment of the Arts. I was a hardcore arts guy who got a day job that combined all these amazing fields.

What are some things that cities have done on their own initiative?

People in New York City's Mayor's Office have always supported the arts. Under Mayor Bloomberg, they put a work of art on the cover of every city publication, including the budget. There's an artist-in-residence at the Department of Sanitation. Both the Minneapolis and St. Paul mayors have put artists-in-residence in City Hall. L.A. recently put out a call for an artist-in-resident for its Department of Transportation to work on an initiative to reduce the number of traffic deaths. Taos and Santa Fe are known for art being in the very fabric of everything you look at. And I've seen this in every kind of community in the country.

Can you think of any projects focused on aging per se?

There's a fascinating woman named Joan Jeffri, who used to be a professor at Columbia University, who's done interesting studies about aging artists. One, on visual artists in New York City that she called Above Ground, had a message that 'artist' can be a 'master identity' that transcends age and socioeconomic status and can lead to a higher life satisfaction.

How can this apply to older folks living in residences?

When I worked at New York City's Office of Cultural Affairs, we worked with seniors (in a program called Seniors Meet the Arts, or SMARTS) to teach them juggling because it involves fine and gross motor skills, which has been shown to be the best for preventing, or in some cases reversing dementia. There's also the Bowery Street Poetry Café, a project for Alzheimer's patients. Because even when a person couldn't remember what day it was, they could remember that poem they had to memorize in second grade.

Mark Morris's ballet troupe here in Brooklyn has a program for people with Parkinson's because many of those patients are able to dance when they can't walk. Another program connected LGBT high school students with LGBT senior citizens to share oral history. It's a very interesting way of understanding history and identity and the breadth of that community. And there's a whole dimension that's art therapy, and not just painting. To regain her speech after being shot, [Congresswoman] Gabby Giffords worked with a music therapist.

Are some cities or communities more innately "art-rich"?

The thing to realize is that artists are the one asset that is present in every community. So when you're thinking about asset-based community development, not every city will have a beautiful waterfront or strong public transportation system or major university. But every single community has people who sing and dance and tell stories. Most art is consumed in-person, in real time and with other people. So because of that, people have to go somewhere and do something together. That drives foot traffic, which is good community development 101. You want positive street presence, you want eyes on the street and public safety. And when you have big groups of people, they tend to

spend money, because they want to buy a sandwich or magazine or dinner or a drink. Arts and culture can drive foot traffic, local economies and improve public safety.

Of course, if that's all you cared about, you could invest in a soccer stadium, transit hub or big-box store and get the same result. But why we ultimately need art is because the arts do something that nothing else does, which is drive more stable communities and build community attachment and social cohesion and civic engagement. Our research shows that people who participate in the arts are more likely to participate in activities beyond the arts, like volunteering, at higher rates. I think it's fair to say Wal-Mart doesn't drive social cohesion.

Beyond the sociological aspects, how can these kinds of community art projects benefit individuals?

The NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] published a research-driven white paper called *How Art Works*, showing that when art happens, there are benefits to communities and to individuals. Those benefits include increased creative capacity and insight, the ability to bridge and bond and make connections with people who aren't like you. Art is unique in that it offers individualized experiences, which can comfort you, sometimes provoke you, sometimes challenge you and sometimes it does all of those things.

Art can be a painting by Jasper Johns, it can be my great-grandmother's lacemaking.... I think of community arts as creating these "campfire moments" where we can come together with a bunch of other people to do nothing. This isn't a meeting, there isn't an agenda, there isn't a to-do list. Often art is just a call to come together and be with fellow human beings, which is at the root of the individual transformation.

APPENDIX



A CALL TO ACTION



“There’s a horrible bias against funding for healthy aging in adults. We need to invest in the population 60 and older.”
—Ellen Michelson

The experts, advocates, funders and teachers quoted and profiled in this eBook are all doing valuable work in at least one of these areas, but creating a movement requires many hands contributing in ways large and small.

“There’s a horrible bias against funding for healthy aging in adults. We need to invest in the population 60 and older,” says Ellen Michelson of Aroha Philanthropies.



A 5-Pronged Effort

Her organization is focusing its artful aging efforts on five key areas:

1. Fighting ageism in America
2. Developing organizations
3. Training teaching artists
4. Funding, with an emphasis on collaborative funding among arts funders, aging funders and health funders
5. Research



10 Ways You Can Support Artful Aging

What can you do to help? For starters, be vocal and show support in your community. Here are some steps you can take to make sure everyone has access to the kinds of participatory arts programming that helps people stay vital, connected, healthy and joyful throughout life:

1. Advocate for having arts programs for older adults in your communities.
2. Make sure older adults you know are involved in existing programs.
3. Get involved in research to accelerate number of studies to provide the data we need.
4. Fund programs.
5. Donate to organizations that are offering programs to older adults.
6. Take a class yourself.
7. Make sure arts organizations know there's a market for this kind of programming.
8. Ask for programs at your local library, church, school or nonprofit
9. Ask about artful aging programming when you visit facilities and communities for older adults.
10. Volunteer with a program in your community.

To learn more about artful aging and find more inspiration for how you can get involved, go to [Next Avenue's special report](#).

