Stories for Change

Leadership Examples of Expanding the Arts to New Audiences

Partners for Livable Communities
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“Change is the only constant in this era. New audience change will come from two major forces: the **AGING** of America’s population and **NEWCOMERS** to our country who can enrich our economic and civic lives. Are you ready for these consumers?”

—Robert H. McNulty, President and CEO of Partners for Livable Communities

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Founded in 2008, Lifetime Arts promotes arts programming designed to engage older adults. A nonprofit organization, Lifetime Arts is committed to developing innovative programs which support creative aging and lifelong learning. To that end, Lifetime Arts offers a variety of services and programs. The organization is a clearinghouse for best practices; provides technical assistance, information services, and professional development to the individuals and organizations serving older adults through the arts; and helps to develop policy to enhance the quality of arts programs for older adults throughout the country.

As a service organization, Lifetime Arts developed *Creative Aging in Our Communities: The Public Libraries Project*, a program which demonstrates the viability and value of instructional arts programs offered in public libraries as a way to build a broad base of support for creative aging programming. *The Public Libraries Project* showcases the library as a center for access and learning for older adults; an “age-neutral” public space, the library is an accessible hub for older adults who are reluctant to go to senior centers, and is swiftly becoming an ideal center for programs that interest seniors.

*The Public Libraries Project* supports collaborations between professional teaching artists and public libraries to implement free instructional arts programs specifically designed for older adults. The project also builds the capacity of public libraries to respond to the demand for meaningful programming for an aging population, and introduces libraries to its creative aging approach and resources by providing incentive grants, professional development, and ongoing technical assistance. Led by professional teaching artists, a series of hands-on workshops allows for in-depth arts education through which participants build skills, explore new materials, and learn a variety of art-making techniques.

Teaching artists create a safe and risk-free environment where experimentation is encouraged. Instructional arts programming through the project is free for all participants, and takes place in 27 public libraries in New York City and Brooklyn. Programming includes a wide range of arts disciplines: storytelling and oral history, short story and memoir-writing (digital and written), quilt-making, poetry, drawing, painting, watercolor, collage-
For the arts community, *Creative Aging in Our Communities* has illuminated the need and the opportunity to expand the boundaries of arts education and community arts programming beyond the K-12 arena and after-school programs—to include older adults. *The Public Libraries Project* has also demonstrated that it is possible to introduce, expand and sustain creative aging programming across different types of library systems, a process that has implications for how libraries across the country can respond effectively to the aging of the U.S. population.

For each library system, a program of professional development introduces librarians to creative aging best practices, current research, and model programs. Through ongoing technical assistance, librarians learn how to identify and partner with local and regional artists and community-arts organizations, conduct a facility assessment, survey patrons, recruit participants, promote and market arts programs, and fund and sustain creative aging programs. *As Creative Aging in Our Communities* continues to expand to serve more library systems, Lifetime Arts acknowledges the importance of designing the content and delivery of the technical support and professional development components to reflect the varying resources and staff capacities of different library systems.

Lifetime Arts acknowledges that, in order for any resulting implementation model to be applicable nationally, rural systems must be included. Rural libraries face unique programming challenges and often function as the sole point of access to the arts. It has become very clear that, for many library systems, the reality of staff reductions, reduced hours, and budget cuts must be considered in determining any new program responsibilities or professional development. Finally, it also is clear that creative aging programs depend on successful partnerships with community artists, and that librarians need help identifying and connecting with them.

*Creative Aging in Our Communities* envisions reliance on the welcoming, information-rich public space of the library for delivery of arts education for and with older adults. Reaching beyond the barriers of the traditional institution, Lifetime Arts helps libraries create effective collaborations between teaching artists and librarians; build the capacity of different library systems to carry out and sustain the programs; and identify new sources of funds to initiate work in new systems. Teaching artists and librarians have strengths in common that enable them to design and implement arts programs for older adults—while they are expanding the capacity of libraries, a nearly-ubiquitous community resource, to improve the quality of life for a growing segment of library patrons.