

# COUNTERING THE NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF AGEING AND AGEISM THROUGH THE POWER OF MUSIC: *Key to Life's Third Act*

## *Using Music As Medicine to Heal the Body, Mind and Creative Spirit.*

**VIVA VERDI!**, a feature documentary, is an intimate glimpse into the lives of the celebrated opera singers and musicians living out their "third act" actively ageing - creatively and passionately - while mentoring international music students who live among them at Milan's unique retirement home, Casa Verdi, built by renown opera composer Giuseppe Verdi in 1896. VIVA VERDI! shines a spotlight on the underserved elder population, and as a living lab for active ageing, provides a new blue print for retirement homes worldwide. It educates and compels audiences to be activists for change, engaging the media, families and communities, including health conferences and film festivals worldwide, in ongoing discussions, bringing immediacy to subjects of ageism, music therapy, health care, retirement homes, creativity, humanity and the arts in general.

## **THE DEMOGRAPHICS<sup>1</sup>**

There is significant data collected on America's ageing population in Population Reference Bureau report, "Aging in the United States" <sup>2</sup> (January 2016).

- The number of Americans age 65 and older, is projected to more than double from 46 million today to over 98 million by 2060, and the 65-and-older age group's share of the total population will rise to nearly 24 percent from 15 percent.
- Average U.S. life expectancy increased from 68 years in 1950 to 79 years in 2013, in large part due to the reduction in mortality at older ages. Larger numbers of seniors, strain an already over-taxed retirement system.
- There are wide economic disparities across different population subgroups. Among adults age 65 and older, 18 percent of Latinos and 19 percent of African Americans

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*Research shows that there are significant links between experiences of ageism and/or racism and discrimination, with poor physical and mental health, reduced productivity and reduced life expectancy.*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.prb.org/Publications/Media-Guides/2016/aging-unitedstates-fact-sheet.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.prb.org/pdf16/aging-us-population-bulletin.pdf>

lived in poverty in 2014 - more than twice the rate among older non-Hispanic whites (8 percent). This, in turn, creates a disparity in the quality of care based on wealth.

- Demand for elder care will also be fueled by a steep rise in the number of Americans living with Alzheimer's disease, which could nearly triple by 2050 to 14 million, from 5 million in 2013. Greater number of seniors will be cut off from their connection to family, friends and the world around them.

### WHAT IS AGEISM?

Ageism is generally thought to be composed of two distinct facets: explicit ageism and implicit ageism and may be explained in this way...

"Ageism manifests both explicitly and implicitly, distinguished by intentionality. Explicit ageism occurs when there is a conscious awareness, intention or control in the thoughts, feelings or actions of an institution, law or person in regards to the treatment or consideration of an older adult. Conversely, implicit ageism includes thoughts, feelings and actions toward older adults that exist and operate without conscious awareness, intention or control (Levy & Banaji, 2004)."

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*A study by Yale researcher Becca Levy and colleagues followed several hundred older adults for more than two decades. Researchers found that people who had internalized more negative attitudes towards ageing were significantly more likely to suffer impairments and need nursing home care, and died on average 7-1/2 years earlier than people with more negative attitudes towards ageing.*

Many observers agree: compared to sexism, racism or transphobia, ageism is the least censored, the most acceptable and unnoticed of the cruel prejudices.<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that ageism could be negative or positive with respect to elders and may include the young or the old.

Ageism includes stereotypes, myths, outright disdain and dislike, avoidance of contact, and discrimination in housing, employment, and services of many kinds. At a time when conditions have vastly improved for women, gay people, disabled people and minorities, prejudice against older adults remains among the most acceptable and pervasion "isms." Even while venerating elders for their wisdom, cultures across the world have disparaged the weakness and unattractiveness of those past the bloom of youth. "Senectus morbidus est," wrote Roman philosopher Seneca in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.: "Old Age is disease."

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<sup>3</sup> *Ending Ageism or How Not to Shoot Old People* (Margaret Gullette, Rutgers University Press)

More recently, Maggie Kuhn, the founder of the Gray Panthers agreed, arguing in 1978 that the prevalent cultural view of old age “as a disastrous disease, which nobody wants to admit to having,” should be eliminated and replaced with an image of old age as a time of “strength” (Dychtwald, 2012). Yet, current studies suggest that in the subsequent decades, age stereotypes (or beliefs about old people as a category) have become more negative (Mason, Kuntz, & McGill, 2015; Ng, Allore, Trentalange, Monin, & Levy, 2015).<sup>4</sup>

### **CASA VERDI DEMONSTRATES A VIABLE SOLUTION**

Researchers and activists are rigorously proposing many policies that could impact the lives of seniors and counter the negative effects of ageism. They range from rights-based principles of disability policies, based on the “normalization principle” which advocates society using the successful models from the field of disability to improve gerontology<sup>5</sup>, to artistic representation such as those found in the upcoming film, VIVA VERDI! The documentary explores aspects of ageing and ageism, most specifically in improving the quality of life for seniors through music and the arts via performance, creativity, music therapy, social interaction and the mentoring of young musicians.

At Casa Verdi, music is medicine with music therapy playing an important role as a healthcare tool. This regular musical cognitive stimulation results in consistent elevated mood and increased socialization. Lives are transformed through singing – the miraculous sonic medium that moves, energizes and heals us. Instantly, music can lift our soul, bring back memories of the past, and make us want to dance away. Most of us enjoy music without being aware of its full impact on us. In VIVA VERDI!, we will come to understand the healing powers of music and its effects, while taking a closer look at how music activates the physical body in a transformative process.

“Vibrating sounds form patterns, creating energy fields of resonance and movement in surrounding space. We absorb these energies, and they subtly alter our breath, pulse, blood pressure, muscle tension, skin temperature and other internal rhythms. Sound shapes and sculpts us inside and out. Depending on their wave forms and other characteristics, sounds can have a charging and releasing effect. In some cases, they positively charge the brain and body,” writes Don Campbell in *The Mozart Effect*.

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<sup>4</sup>[https://academic.oup.com/gerontologist/article/57/suppl\\_2/S118/3913371/Age-Stereotype-Paradox-Opportunity-for-Social](https://academic.oup.com/gerontologist/article/57/suppl_2/S118/3913371/Age-Stereotype-Paradox-Opportunity-for-Social)

<sup>5</sup> *Introducing an Equal Rights Framework for Older Persons in Residential Care* (Håkan Jönson, Phd; Tove Harnett, Phd, *The Gerontologist*, Vol 52, Issue 5)

VIVA VERDI! unveils the effects of music on the elderly to combat and stave off Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, dementia, cognitive function. Our social impact goal is to implement music therapy into every hospital and retirement home, creating a positive outcome for the ageing population, and to incorporate active ageing into daily life.

### **MUSIC AS THERAPY - IMPACT POINTS**

Music, and music therapy which is now a deductible on health care policies, is a cost-efficient way to effect the quality of life for all, especially for seniors who are often isolated and disconnected from their familial and social networks. It holds a wealth of benefits for everyone but particularly for the elderly, and has until recently, been highly underutilized by all aspects of senior care. Examples of the beneficially impactful nature of music include:

- **Music Heals** - A wealth of new studies are touting the benefits of music on mental and physical health. Daniel J. Levitin, PhD and his postgraduate research fellow, Mona Lisa Chanda, PhD, found that music improves the body's immune system function and reduces stress.<sup>6</sup>
- **Music Increases Happiness** - It only takes 15 minutes of listening to one's favorite tunes to get a natural "high." This is because your brain releases dopamine, a neurotransmitter that leads to increased feelings of happiness, excitement, and joy when you listen to music you like.<sup>7</sup>
- **Music Decreases Stress, While Increasing Overall Health** - Music has a direct effect on hormones. If you listen to music you enjoy, it decreases levels of the hormone cortisol in your body, counteracting the effects of chronic stress. Stress causes 60% of all illnesses and diseases, so lower levels of stress means higher chances of overall well-being.
- **Music Improves Sleep** - Insomnia and general sleep disturbances are common among older adults and the elderly. A recent study showed that listening to classical or relaxing music within an hour of going to bed significantly improves sleep, compared to listening to an audiobook or doing nothing before bed.<sup>8</sup>
- **Music Reduces Depression and Anxiety** - Music has a direct effect on

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*At Harvard Medical School, Dr. Gottfried Schlaug used real time video of the brain to prove that singing and rhythmic protocols actually rewires damaged portions of the brain.*

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*Listening to music was also found to be more effective than prescription drugs in reducing anxiety before surgery (Trends in Cognitive Sciences, April, 2013).*

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2013/11/music.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> <http://liveforlivemusic.com/features/10-positive-benefits-of-listening-to-music-according-to-science/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.insomnia.net/sleep-health/elderly/>

hormones; it can even be considered a natural antidepressant. This is because certain tunes cause the release of serotonin and dopamine (neurotransmitters) in the brain that lead to increased feelings of happiness and well-being. It also releases norepinephrine, which is a hormone that invokes feelings of euphoria.<sup>9</sup>

- **Music Strengthens Learning and Memory** – Listening to music can also help you learn and recall information more efficiently, researchers say. One of the reasons the link between music and memory is so powerful, is that it activates such large areas of the brain. A recent brain imaging study found that music activated the auditory, motor and limbic (emotional) regions (Alluri et al., 2013).<sup>10</sup>
- **Music Stimulates** – Music turns on the auditory system and tones the brain for auditory fitness.

### **THE ANTI-AGEISM MOVEMENT**

The world's population is growing older by the minute. This oncoming flood, the so-called "silver tsunami," will be driven by the baby boomers, people born during the population spike after World War II who are now reaching old age. With that, the anti-ageism movement is gaining momentum through several facets of society including organizations representing seniors that have substantially expanded their missions to address the ever-changing needs of the aging population since their inception,<sup>11</sup> such as AARP, the Gray Panther and the SSA. Other agents of change for active ageing include:

- **NYC Department for The Ageing (DFTA)**<sup>12</sup> has a mission "to work for the empowerment, independence, dignity and quality of life of New York City's diverse older adults and for the support of their families through advocacy, education and the coordination and delivery of services." Funded by federal, state, and city endowments, DFTA provides services such as hot meals, activities at senior centers, home-delivered meals, case management, home care, transportation, and legal services.
- **Women's Alzheimer's Movement**, founded by Maria Shriver, is a global alliance of individuals, organizations, researchers, etc., who deal with women's

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<sup>9</sup> Factors associated with both increased age and depressive symptoms (such as being female, lower income, physical disability, cognitive impairment, and social support) have been shown to be contributors to senior depression. (<https://academic.oup.com/geronj/article-abstract/46/6/M210/634043>)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.spring.org.uk/2013/12/music-and-memory-5-awesome-new-psychology-studies.php>

<sup>11</sup> AARP founded in 1958 to address the social needs of seniors but has expanded to include all aspects of senior life. Gray Panthers founded in 1970 to address the issue of forced retirement at 65 yet today its mission is to "work for social and economic justice and peace for all people. Senior Service America (SSA) was founded in 1961 to address workplace and retirement issues but now advocates for political and legislative issues that affects older adults.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dfta/html/about/about.shtml>

Alzheimer's disease.

- **The Motion Picture & Television Foundation (MPTF)** in Los Angeles, founded by Charlie Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford and D. W. Griffith in 1921. By actively working with industrial designers, architects, technologist and entrepreneurs, MPTF is helping to redefine the ageing process, and advance our healthcare culture by shifting from treating illness to enabling wellness. Chief Innovation Officer, Dr. Scott Kaiser, is a Harvard - trained geriatric medicine specialist, who is personally committed to developing innovative care delivery models to improve the health and quality of life of older adults.
- **Administration on Aging**
  - Federal agency advocating the elderly, their day-to-day needs and struggles.
  - Aims to bring issues faced by the elderly to the forefront of congress and other federal systems in addition to the general public.
  - Educates elderly and their caregivers/families on benefits and services available.
- **SingFit**, (2016 Consumers' Choice Award winner for Health Innovations@50+) - Any Tubman and Rachel Francine's music healing app - a music-therapist-designed cognitive and physical stimulation program crafted especially for the senior living industry.
- **Encore**, Mark Friedman's Bay Area not-for-profit organization working to promote encore careers for seniors.
- **Justice in Aging**, a national non-profit legal advocacy organization that fights senior poverty through law, formerly known as the **National Senior Citizens Law Center**. Since 1972, they have worked for access to affordable health care and economic security for older adults with limited resources, focusing especially on populations that have traditionally lacked legal protection such as women, people of color, LGBT individuals, and people with limited English proficiency. "Through targeted advocacy, litigation, and the trainings and resources we provide to local advocates, we ensure access to the social safety net programs that poor seniors depend on, including Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, and Supplemental Security Income (SSI)."<sup>13</sup>
- **This Chair Rocks: A Manifesto Against Ageism**, written by Ashton AppleWhite.<sup>14</sup> The Los Angeles Review of Books notes, "Until **This Chair**

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.justiceinaging.org>

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.ted.com/talks/ashton\\_applewhite\\_let\\_s\\_end\\_ageism#t-13567](https://www.ted.com/talks/ashton_applewhite_let_s_end_ageism#t-13567)

*Rocks* we haven't had a single compact book that blows up myths seven to a page like fireworks." AppleWhite is also the voice of the blog ***Yo, Is This Ageist?***

- ***The Radical Age Movement (RAM)*** founded by Alice Fisher, takes a leadership role in driving initiatives that help people live longer through the creation of systems and legislation that protect the benefits and lives of older individuals.
  - Actively lobbies communities to join the fight against Ageism.
  - Galvanized seniors in metro New York in protest against President Trump's efforts to end healthcare for 22 million Americans - many being elders on Medicaid and Medicare.
  - Advocates No "Age Separation" which puts generations in opposition to one another.
  - Works to reposition seniors as an independent group that doesn't solely depend upon other generations for help, support, and representation.
- ***WHO Global Network for Age Friendly Cities and Communities***<sup>15</sup> was established to foster the exchange of experience and mutual learning between cities and communities worldwide striving to better meet the needs of their older residents.

In the arts, other documentaries that are also creating a spotlight on the positive side of ageing and effecting change include:

- ***IF YOU AREN'T IN THE OBIT, EAT BREAKFAST***, Carl Reiner's 2017 documentary tracks down other celebrated people in their 90s and beyond, who show how the twilight years can be among the happiest and most rewarding.
- ***AGING GRACEFULLY***, Lizzie Elliott's 2016 short documentary that profiles 94-year-old Grace Elliott as she shares her incredible life, as well as the hardships she experiences as she faces the trials of ageing.
- ***ALIVE INSIDE: A STORY OF MUSIC AND MEMORY*** by Michael Rossato-Bennett is the story of Dan Cohen, founder of the nonprofit ***Music & Memory***, as he fights against a broken healthcare system to demonstrate music's ability to combat memory loss, and restore a deep sense of self to those suffering from it.
- ***AGE OF CHAMPIONS*** directed by Christopher Rufo, is the 2011 award-

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<sup>15</sup> [http://www.who.int/ageing/projects/age\\_friendly\\_cities\\_network/en/](http://www.who.int/ageing/projects/age_friendly_cities_network/en/)

winning documentary that follows five senior competitors up to 100 years of age, who sprint, leap, and swim for gold at the National Senior Olympics.

- ***THE LADY IN NUMBER 6: MUSIC SAVED MY LIFE*** directed by Malcolm Clarke. The 2014 Oscar-winning short documentary tells the story of 109-year-old Alice Herz-Sommer, the world's oldest pianist and Holocaust survivor, and how music saved her life during her time at the Theresienstadt concentration camp, and in the years that followed.

#### ***VIVA VERDI! AS PART OF ENTERTAINMENT WAVE ADDRESSING AGEISM***

In addition to dispelling myths centered around ageism, VIVA VERDI! is part of a wave of entertainment creating a new paradigm - changing the dynamic of older adult care that is keeping seniors mentally and physically healthy through active ageing. Casa Verdi in Milan and the MPTF Home in Los Angeles, are considered "living labs" that are creating a new blueprint for ageing well and enjoying a healthy, creative, "third act of life." Both are helping to redefine the ageing process - changing the dynamic of older adult care that is keeping seniors mentally and physically healthy through active ageing. 10,000 people have been turning 65 everyday in the US alone since 2010, and will continue to burden an already overwhelmed healthcare system unless positive change is embraced.

In VIVA VERDI!, we will explore how music therapy reawakens the soul, and how the healing power of the arts elevates one's life. We will dive deep into the human spirit where humanities, science, and the arts reveal answers to mysterious questions about ageing and creative expression. We will find answers to the questions: what are the secrets to staying energetic for so long, and what are the frustrations of living in a society that tends to marginalize this age bracket. Our goal is to address music as medicine, ageing as the antagonist, and the benefits of living a creative life at any age. VIVA VERDI! will strive to Verdi's own standard and the filmmakers', of elevating humanity through storytelling, creating a more vibrant blueprint for retirement homes where music and the arts play a more prominent role.

#### ***INTERGENERATIONAL IMPACT***

VIVA VERDI! also emphasizes how the educational mentoring relationships between senior instructors and younger students is a boon to the senior population.

Research has shown that successful innovative intergenerational programs such as the one that exists at Casa Verdi, demonstrate that these student/teacher collaborations result in "increased dignity of older people and people with dementia within the

community, and increased public awareness about the existing care and support services available to them.”<sup>16</sup>

Cross-generational exchange also reduces senior isolation and loneliness - one of the main links to long-term illness and increased mortality. According to a study in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, both isolation and loneliness are associated with higher risk of mortality in adults aged 52 and older. One possible explanation: “People who live alone or lack social contacts may be at increased risk of death if acute symptoms develop, because there is less of a network of confidantes to prompt medical attention.” Efforts to reduce isolation and increase interaction are key to addressing the issue of mortality, said the study’s authors.

#### **THEMES EXPLORED IN VIVA VERDI!**

- ❖ How older, active adults can demonstrate that age is a state of mind, showing another side of the phenomenon of longer life spans: the many people in their later years who are still sharp and vigorous and engaged.
- ❖ How music and creativity can improve the quality of life for seniors.
- ❖ How music pierces the veil of dementia and Alzheimer’s disease, and reconnects seniors to the outside world, their community and caregivers.
- ❖ How to integrate the transformative medium of music into everyday life.
- ❖ How cross-generational exchange contributes to the health and well being of seniors.
- ❖ How community around seniors (other residents, school, teaching, practicing, etc.) keeps seniors feeling relevant, vibrant and active, and breaks the barrier of senior isolation.
- ❖ How change in public policy can contribute to anti-ageism, and provide support for seniors, not unlike those received by the disabled.
- ❖ How arts and the humanities, such as music and art therapy are instrumental in non-pharmacological management of anxiety, restlessness and agitation.
- ❖ How a new paradigm on active ageing can inspire and inform generations.

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<sup>16</sup> *An Evaluative Study of the Benefits of Participating in Intergenerational Playgroups in Aged Care for Older People* (C. Margaret Skropeta, Alf Colvin and Shannon Sladen, *BMC Geriatrics*, 2014 - Published: 8 October 2014)

## **WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP.**

We are requesting underwriting grant of \$70,000 to help the filmmakers complete post-production which includes a comprehensive study guide for health-care professionals, senior residences and politicians.

Our agenda also includes convening a meeting between filmmakers and agencies/organizations that could leverage the educational and inspirational tool of the documentary, *VIVA VERDI!*, to shine a brighter light on the challenge of seniors living alone or in residences, where music may be used as a tool to fight the isolation that all too many seniors experience.

### VIVA VERDI! ADVISORY BOARD

1. Dr. Khalid Ali, MBBS, FRCP, MD, Senior Lecturer in Geriatrics, Brighton and Sussex Medical School, also a film critic for BMJ Blogs (Medical Humanities), as well as film festivals including Cannes, London Human Rights Festival, and Dubai Film Festival. In 2013, Dr. Ali was appointed as the editor for 'Screening room' the film reviews section in Medical Humanities Journal. He is a strong advocate of music and the arts in combating adverse symptoms that the elderly have to deal with.
2. Dr. Scott Kaiser, Chief Innovation Officer at MPTF in Los Angeles, is a Harvard-trained geriatric medicine specialist, who is personally committed to developing innovative care delivery models to improve the health and quality of life of older adults.
3. Lynzee Klingman, Academy Award-nominated editor and former Academy Governor, Editor's Branch: *ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST*, *A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT*, *ALI*, *WAR OF THE ROSES*, etc.
4. Lynne Littman, Academy Award-winning documentary director/producer, and former Academy Governor of the Documentary Branch: *TESTAMENT*, *NUMBER OUR DAYS*, *HAVING OUR SAY: THE DELANY SISTERS' FIRST 100 YEARS*, etc.

### VIVA VERDI CONTACT INFORMATION

Yvonne Russo, Director/Producer: russo.yvonne@gmail.com, 626-807-9507

Christine La Monte, Producer/Executive Producer: chrislamonte@mac.com, 310-922-3092

Ron Simons, Producer/Executive Producer: ron@simonsaysentertainment.com, 917-797-9704

## **APPENDIX A**

## Maine Policy Review

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### *The Role of Foundation Grantmakers in Responding to Community Aging: John T. Gorman Foundation*

by Tony Cipollone

John T. Gorman Foundation, [tcipollone@jtgfoundation.org](mailto:tcipollone@jtgfoundation.org)

*Policy Review 24.2 (2015) : 119 -121, <http://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mpr/vol24/iss2/26>. This Interview is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine.*

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Foundations respond to a variety of compelling needs. How do you reconcile the responsibility of addressing the needs of Maine's aging citizens in light of other competing issues?

*Using data as a decision-making tool is a core value of our foundation. A few years back as we were developing our current strategic plan, we used demographic information to help us to understand the challenges associated with particular populations in Maine. While we didn't anticipate making seniors one of our foundation's priority investment areas, it was hard to ignore the compelling picture painted by current and future demographic trends. By far, seniors represent the largest percentage of our state's population, and unfortunately many face some significant challenges. Almost one in ten are living at or below the federal poverty rate, and seniors 85 and older are about 50 percent more likely to be poor. About a third of seniors live only on Social Security. One in nine has been a victim of elder abuse, and 15 percent of these victims have suffered from financial exploitation (usually at the hand of a family member). Almost 40 percent live alone, and far too many experience significant isolation.*

*Given these statistics and our foundation's mission, we were hard pressed not to devote some of our resources annually to helping more seniors to age safely and comfortably in their homes and communities, which according to local and national surveys is the overwhelming desire of seniors in our state. However, seniors are also not the only population we focus on at the John T. Gorman Foundation. The challenge for us is to ensure that we make the strongest and most strategic investments we can to advance the supports and opportunities that seniors need and work to leverage more attention and resources to this issue from other philanthropies and public systems.*

Is there a special role that you see philanthropy playing in promoting the experience of positive aging in Maine communities? If yes, what is it? If no, why not?

*On the whole, foundations have greater flexibility in their ability to devote and deploy resources to promote positive aging in Maine communities. Given this, philanthropy can play a role on a number of fronts that involve varying degrees of risk. These include*

- *Raising awareness about the issues facing seniors in Maine by making investments in data and policy analysis that provide critical information about how well seniors in different parts of the state are faring, the particular contextual challenges they face, and what might be done—based on*

*research and best practices about program and policy interventions statewide and nationally—to address such challenges successfully.*

- *Creating incentives and partnerships with state government and local municipalities to invest creatively in addressing the needs of seniors.*
- *Investing in efforts that help meet seniors' critical basic needs (food, home safety, heating assistance) that for this population serve as preventive supports that can keep seniors out of more expensive and sometimes unnecessary institutional care.*
- *Where appropriate, use their resources to become investors in critical infrastructure and redevelopment efforts (housing, transportation, new community centers) through vehicles such as low-interest/no-interest loans and loan guarantees.*
- *Participating in regional solutions that are more likely to influence policy and garner support at the federal level (a strategy that a number of philanthropies from Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont are already pursuing).*

*While these are but some of the things that philanthropy might consider doing, what is absolutely critical to keep in mind is what this sector cannot and should not do: act alone. The fact is philanthropic resources represent a small fraction of the investments that are actually needed to help our seniors to thrive.*

*They can supplement, but absolutely cannot supplant, the investments that need to be made by government and the private sector if we are to get ahead of this critical challenge.*

What strategies, broadly speaking, do you think are likely to be most successful in promoting the well-being of older adults in Maine, the oldest and most rural state in the nation?

*As a rule, we believe that given the complexities of the challenges facing many of our seniors (as well as other disadvantaged Mainers), the smartest and potentially the most successful strategies will likely be those that are comprehensive in scope and grounded in both best practice and the particular realities of different geographic regions. The fact is that seniors are not homogeneous and may need different supports and opportunities at different times in their lives. The basic question should always be: what does this particular senior require to successfully age in the place of her choosing. For some, it may be as basic as having a trusted and compassionate neighbor they can call on in a pinch; for others, it may be a connection to needed basic resources such as food, heating assistance, or health care for a chronic, debilitating condition. Other seniors may face more challenging issues such as unsafe housing or the fear of losing precious financial resources to a predatory relative.*

*For us, this implies that the most effective strategies will likely be those that are rooted in communities; reflect the regional/local needs of senior residents; and knit together so that they can be delivered in an integrated way—i.e., they represent a system of supports that can be tapped into by seniors and caregivers over time, depending on need and desire. Finally, we believe that the most effective strategies will be those that attend to the reality that seniors (like everyone else) are likely to need a connection to someone they trust who can both assuage their apprehension about taking advantage of a particular opportunity or support and help them to navigate whatever process is required to do so.*

Does philanthropy have the power to create age-friendly communities?

*First, the word “power” is an odd one to use in the context of philanthropy. Foundations really don't have the power to change or create something. What we do have, however, is the ability and*

*opportunity—if we choose to take advantage of it—to inform and influence how people and sectors think about issues and challenges and to support promising and proven solutions to address them. The power of a foundation lies in the capacity and willingness of the people, organizations, and communities it funds to make a measurable difference.*

*Second, as noted earlier, foundations do not—even when all philanthropic dollars are pooled—have the ability to support, let alone create, something like age-friendly communities at a scale that may be needed in Maine. Can philanthropy play a role? Absolutely, but it needs to be part of a broader effort that includes public and private participation and resources.*

*That said, foundations can and should do what they can to stimulate and create incentives for thinking and action that enable communities to help seniors maintain their safety, their dignity, and their independence. To paraphrase an African proverb, supportive communities are not only critical for raising healthy, successful children—they're significant for seniors as well.*

If an anonymous benefactor wrote your foundation a blank check to address the challenges of aging in Maine, what would you consider doing?

*If money were no object, I think you'd have to consider the tough issues that make life particularly hard for many Maine seniors. They include the following:*

- **Investing in transportation.** *It's virtually impossible to have a conversation about seniors in any community without the challenge of transportation quickly emerging. Given this, we'd suggest creating a fund that enables less populated communities to develop innovative approaches to the issue and helping more densely populated areas consider more options for public transportation.*
- **Investing in technology.** *Around the country (and here in Maine) there are new ideas for using technology to better meet the needs of seniors. They range from using technology to monitor and meet senior needs in a nonintrusive way to driverless transportation. Capturing the power of technology for the benefit of seniors at a level that is commensurate with the scale of our population seems to be an area that is ripe for investments.*
- **Investing in new housing and alternative housing models.** *Even with the state's encouraging conversations about the need to expand senior housing, the fact remains that we are scratching the surface of existing need. There is a need for investments that can help seniors in older homes to make needed repairs and adjustments, as well as for new housing that can better meet their needs and ensure a connection to communities. -*

**Tony Cipollone** is president and CEO of the John T. Gorman Foundation, a Portland-based private foundation dedicated to improving the lives of disadvantaged people in Maine. Since joining the foundation in 2011, he has helped advance a range of new investment strategies aimed at improving results for children, youth, and families. Formerly, he worked in senior leadership at the Annie E. Casey Foundation for over 20 years and helped develop and lead numerous initiatives related to education, community redevelopment, and policy advocacy, including Casey's national KIDS COUNT project.

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