



**NEWS RELEASE**  
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**The Challenging Horizons Program Receives  
National Afterschool Innovator Award from MetLife Foundation  
at Irmo Lights On Afterschool Open House**

MetLife Foundation and the Afterschool Alliance today honored The Challenging Horizons Program (CHP) with an Afterschool Innovator Award in recognition of the program's success mentoring students who are transitioning from elementary to middle school and to middle school students who are receiving supplemental education. MetLife Managing Director Kenneth Thurmond and Agency Marketing Director Gregory Bishop presented the Award at an open house that was part of *Lights On Afterschool*, the only nationwide rally for afterschool programs. CHP also received \$5,000 to sustain its work.

"Despite the many benefits of afterschool programs, far too many youth in middle and high school do not have access to high quality programs during these critical hours," said Dennis White, president of MetLife Foundation. "We are pleased to join the Afterschool Alliance in recognizing and sharing the Challenging Horizons Program's exemplary model of addressing the needs and interests of older youth, which helps put them on the path to success."

The CHP is one of only six afterschool programs nationwide to be named an Afterschool Innovator. It was highlighted in an [Issue Brief](#) on mentoring, part of a series developed by the Afterschool Alliance with funding from MetLife Foundation that examines critical issues facing older youth, schools and communities, and the role that the programs play in addressing these issues. The briefs address opening doors to work and careers, recruiting and retaining older youth; high school dropout prevention; and mentoring. .

The CHP is a comprehensive, multi-modal approach to helping youth who are falling behind academically. A decade ago, the CHP started as a small afterschool program for youth with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. It has evolved to meet the needs of a broad range of students who are falling behind academically. Most of the students are served in afterschool and summer programs staffed primarily by service-learning students from the University of South Carolina. The CHP is currently funded by five 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center grants for afterschool programs.

"It's wonderful to receive this recognition from MetLife Foundation and the Afterschool Alliance," said Dr. Bradley H. Smith, Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of South Carolina and Director of the Challenging Horizons Program. "We know that mentoring and our approach to mentoring can make the critical difference in the lives of youth. We see it every day in the successes of the students who participate in our program. We are proud of them and this great honor."

The *Lights on Afterschool* event included remarks by Irmo Middle School Principal Marie Maldrop and a panel presentation on the CHP Self-Efficacy Coaching and Writing Achievement Program, followed by dinner for all guests.

Organized by the Afterschool Alliance, *Lights On Afterschool* is the only nationwide rally for afterschool programs. The event in Irmo is one of more than 7,500 being held across the country at which children, parents, community leaders, educators and others come together to urge leaders to increase support for the afterschool programs that children and families need. The events also give youth a chance to showcase the skills they learn and talents they develop at their afterschool programs, and to send the message that millions more kids need quality afterschool programs.

“Afterschool programs provide children with unique opportunities to get the exposure, experiences and support they need to achieve success,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “The Afterschool Innovator Awards honor programs that have developed and are using promising practices to help children and youth excel.”

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*The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization working to ensure that all children and youth have access to quality afterschool programs. More information is available at [www.afterschoolalliance.org](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org).*

*MetLife Foundation was established in 1976 by MetLife to carry on its longstanding tradition of corporate contributions and community involvement. In youth development, MetLife Foundation funds initiatives that promote mentoring and provide safe places and constructive activities for young people, particularly during out-of-school time. For more information, visit [www.metlife.org](http://www.metlife.org).*