



NEWS RELEASE  
October 23, 2009

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## **RiverzEdge Receives National Afterschool Award from MetLife Foundation at Providence *Lights On Afterschool* Rally**

The MetLife Foundation and the Afterschool Alliance today honored RiverzEdge Arts Project with an Afterschool Innovator Award in recognition of the program's success fostering art and business skills in at-risk youth by pairing them with established artist and designers to produce and sell commercially viable and artistically merited work. Jeffrey Allison, Financial Advisor at New England Financial, a MetLife company presented the Award at the annual Rhode Island Afterschool Plus Alliance *Lights On Afterschool* event in Providence.

"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 RiverzEdge's exemplary model of addressing the needs and interests of older youth and helping to put them on the path to success."

RiverzEdge is one of only six afterschool programs nationwide to be named an Afterschool Innovator. It was highlighted in an [Issue Brief](#) on afterschool that is 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. RiverzEdge, highlighted in the brief on dropout prevention, was selected to receive the MetLife Afterschool Innovator Award and \$5,000 to sustain its work.

RiverzEdge is unusual in that it operates micro businesses year-round, in a mentoring-based learning model that supports both art skills development and the soft and hard skills for future success. Through the program, youth learn "by doing" alongside experts and peer mentors who support their artistic development and commercial skills one-on-one. At RiverzEdge, high quality arts education is combined with academic support, applied business training and service learning for better future outcomes for youth and a better world

"We are so honored to receive this Afterschool Innovator Award," said RiverzEdge Arts Project Executive Director Bekah Greenwald. "To have our commitment to real-world learning in the arts recognized nationally, and the dedication of our youth to their design and fine arts skills building and output recognized as the contribution to their futures that it is, makes the day-to-day and year-to-year business of learning and growing that much sweeter. It's amazing to see what happens when you invest in individuals, build strong relationships, and provide thoughtful community support. The youth just soar into their futures! One hundred percent of RiverzEdge participants graduate from high school and get accepted to colleges and art schools around the

country, and one hundred percent are better prepared as problem solvers, critical thinkers and engaged citizens to tackle life and societal challenges ahead. We are very proud!”

The *Lights on Afterschool* event, at the Providence Marriott, began with the Rhode Island Afterschool Plus Alliance’s seventh annual “Breakfast of Champions,” featuring CNN anchor and special correspondent Soledad O’Brien, and National Book Award-winning author Jonathan Kozol. The day’s events also included a juried art show, showcasing the work of the RiverzEdge students and other Rhode Island afterschool students. Organized by the Afterschool Alliance, *Lights On Afterschool* is the only nationwide rally for afterschool programs. Today’s event in Providence is one of more than 7,500 being held across the country at which children, parents, community leaders, educators and others are coming together to urge leaders to increase support for the afterschool programs that children and families need. The events 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).*