



THE
ANGELL
FOUNDATION

SPIRITED GRANTMAKING

DISCOVERIES FROM THE
GATHERING ON SPIRITUALITY

NOVEMBER 2009

THE GATHERING AGENDA
WAS STRUCTURED TO:

1
DISCOVER MOTIVES FOR, AND
POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF,
INCORPORATING SPIRITUALITY INTO
THE FABRIC OF AN ORGANIZATION.

2
UNDERSTAND HOW AN EMPLOYEE'S
PERSONAL UNDERSTANDING OF
SPIRITUALITY AFFECTS THEIR WORK.

3
ARRIVE AT A SET OF
RECOMMENDATIONS AS TO HOW,
AND WHETHER, THE FOUNDATION
SHOULD CONTINUE GRANT MAKING
IN THE AREA OF SPIRITUALITY.

INTRODUCTION

In November of 2009, The Angell Foundation organized and facilitated a Gathering on Spirituality, an open forum that brought together eighteen of the Foundation's grantees and sixty-four participants to explore key questions surrounding the Foundation's grant making in the area of spirituality. Funding in this area commenced in 2006 with awards to multiple organizations throughout Southern California and New England that implement diverse spirituality programs. This gathering marked the first convening of all spirituality grantees, and was designed to uncover common threads and principles woven throughout their programming.

The information and recommendations that emerged from the Gathering will inform the Foundations' future planning and grant activities. This publication is being disseminated to other philanthropic and non-profit organizations in the hopes that it will serve as a resource to those interested in incorporating a spiritual core in their programming and/or administrative efforts.

BACKGROUND

Spirituality is an intrinsic part of any act of giving, however, in the Foundation's initial efforts to implement its grant making in this area, it was unable to uncover a common definition of spirituality that could be used in the larger philanthropic community. In an effort to arrive at a shared understanding of the theme of spirituality, the Foundation scoured scholarly journals, religious periodicals, websites, and dictionaries. Definitions that made coherent attempts at explaining spirituality were plentiful, however, most revolved around specific religions, and none captured the essence of what the Foundation sought to achieve through its funding.

This period of research prompted the Foundation staff to embark on a more comprehensive inquiry. Over the course of nine months, the Foundation held four focus groups with members of the philanthropic, religious, social service, and academic communities. Participants were asked to share personal insights into spirituality and the role it could potentially play in the Foundation's philanthropic goals. The Foundation also interviewed key leaders in the field, spoke with spirituality grant makers, and conducted telephone surveys with other service organizations.

Following this period of exploration the Foundation reflected on the bounty of data that had been gathered and concluded that its understanding of spirituality and the goals for its funding, transcend religious boundaries. The Foundation's concept of spirituality can be traced directly to founders David and Lynn Angell, a compassionate and loving couple who offered generous care and support to many who crossed their path. With the Angells as a guiding beacon, the Foundation arrived at the following definition to guide its spirituality funding:

THE FOUNDATION'S SPIRITUALITY GRANT MAKING IS BEING IMPLEMENTED IN THREE PHASES:

PHASE 1 Good Works: Organizations for whom spirituality is a primary and visible part of their mission and activities. The work of these groups embodies what the Foundation identifies as six interrelated aspects of spirituality: self-awareness, transcendence, compassion, interconnectedness, gratitude, and service. Organizations funded in this phase create and oversee diverse programs for specific populations, including palliative care nurses, aging seniors, college students, and clergy. Participants in the organizations' programs met monthly, held retreats to exchange ideas, and participated in spiritual exercises such as journaling, meditation, conscious movement, and prayer. Participation in these programs led many participants to initiate service projects designed to benefit their communities.

PHASE 2 Organizational Spirituality: Organizations for whom spirituality may not be a central focus of their mission, but could potentially benefit from an increased awareness and integration of spirituality in their internal and external activities.

PHASE 3 The third phase of the Foundation's spirituality initiative will focus on cultivating a greater understanding of spirituality in diverse communities, and is still in the planning stages.

A GATHERING ON SPIRITUALITY

The Gathering on Spirituality was a two day event hosted at TreePeople Conference Center in Beverly Hills, California. It was attended by representatives of the first two phases of the spirituality funding – Good Works and Organizational Spirituality – along with members of the Angell Foundation staff and Advisory Committee. Although the Gathering was conceived to explore questions related to spirituality grant making, it also gave participants time for self-reflection and fellowship, and an opportunity to forge personal connections with representatives of other grant organizations. The facilitator, John Ott, referred to the gathering as a sacred event where “people from different faith backgrounds, and with different life contexts and understandings of spirituality, come together to engage with each other.” The event moved fluidly between group discussion, smaller “seed groups” that focused on specific questions, periods of non-denominational spiritual practice, and meditative silence. The following three questions guided the discussion:

HOW DOES MY PERSONAL UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE OF SPIRITUALITY AFFECT MY APPROACH TO MY WORK AND/OR PUBLIC LIFE?

HOW DOES MY ORGANIZATION ORIENT TO SPIRITUALITY?

HAS MY ORGANIZATION ENGAGED IN EXPLORATIONS OF SPIRITUALITY, OR SOUGHT TO EXPLICITLY INTEGRATE SPIRITUALITY INTO ITS WORK? IF SO, TO WHAT EFFECT? WHY HAS THIS BEEN AN IMPORTANT FOCUS FOR THE ORGANIZATION?

To foster a deeper appreciation of life's values and meaning
beyond the material and intellectual.

LESSONS LEARNED

LESSON 1 AN EMPLOYEE'S PERSONAL UNDERSTANDING OF SPIRITUALITY INFLUENCES THE WAY THEY APPROACH THEIR WORK

Spirituality can have many meanings and incorporates values, attitudes, perspectives and beliefs unique to each individual. An underlying assumption of the Foundation's spirituality funding is that a person's own understanding of spirituality is central to their identity, and informs all aspects of their life and interactions with others. Gathering participants overwhelmingly agreed that spirituality – the sense of meaning and purpose that guides their existence – was an important aspect of their lives, and many stated that they often called upon spiritual practices in their professional capacity. Some participants expressed the belief that their sense of spirituality was so intricately woven into their life that they couldn't separate it from their work.

"Spirituality is at the center of everything, and informs everything we do. We can't separate it from our work."

"Spirituality is the root of the sense of gratitude I feel for the work I'm involved in and is the source of the courage required for me to do it."

For others, a sense of spirituality and individual spiritual practices are crucial tools that help them navigate the daily complexities and demands of work. All of the participants, most of whom have devoted their lives to helping others, expressed a need for techniques that could help them center themselves and replenish their reservoir of spiritual energy. They noted that spiritual practices are beneficial tools in this restoration process.

"Whether your spirituality informs your work or your personal life, your goal can't just be helping someone else. You have to start by looking inward and seeing what you need to complete yourself...starting with yourself is where it all begins."

"Taking the time to honor the good in yourself allows you to see others' strengths and walk with them. "When things are overwhelming for the people we serve, doing that can give you gratitude and joy and trust in the process. Spirituality is what lets me focus and trust in those goals of serving."

Participants reported using their own spiritual practices to help them listen deeply to others, to care for themselves, and to fulfill their work responsibilities with grace and intentionality.

"My daily task is to serve others, to really sit still and listen to what people need, rather than what I think they need, there's a shared spirituality there, and that's what I'm working on."

"Spiritual practices can be different but spirituality means being connected with your inner self and with something greater than yourself, to serve a greater purpose. Even though our practices may differ, we can all feel a sense of peace and purpose and service."

LESSON 2 SPIRITUALITY CAN IMPROVE THE HEALTH OF AN ORGANIZATION

Representatives from the Organizational Spirituality Initiative indicated that their spirituality grant enabled them to substantially improve the internal health of their agency. One participant reported that their grant enabled them to embark on a two-year process of "stripping away distractions and personal baggage." This process made it possible for the organization to take stock of itself as a holistic entity, and look objectively at its strengths and weaknesses in an unemotional context. This period of reflection and inquiry resulted in an organization with a clarified sense of purpose, and an increased ability to translate its values into daily activities.

"With the board and staff aligned, decision making has been swift and correct. Everyone feels energized by the process and more committed to what they're doing. There is spirituality in all of this in the sense that we as individuals, and as an organization, have found energy, focus, and a direction that seems as if it comes from beyond us."

Several participants commented that spiritual grounding can help an organization foster improved listening skills, develop greater patience and love for those they serve; and increase its ability to compromise and be flexible.

"It might be hard to quantify, but companies will benefit by employees taking a few minutes for themselves. They'll be more cordial to clients, they won't make mistakes."

Another participant from the Organizational Spirituality Initiative noted that although they'd had an effective board prior to embarking on their process of spiritual realignment, members nonetheless had a hard time "leaving their own agendas at the door and putting them aside for the good of the whole." Through a sustained effort to tend to the internal culture of the organization, their organization underwent a marked change and became noticeably more gracious.

"The money we were given to pursue organizational spirituality gave us an opportunity and a reason to sit in silence from time to time, and peel back the details with respect and commitment. Instead of being carried along by events, we bore down to the core—what motivates us as individuals and as an organization? The process resulted not only in a sense of personal fulfillment, but in a more effective organization. The money spent in the area of spirituality may have a carryover into other areas that an organization works in."

"We feel a deeper commitment to mutual respect, and to listening to every voice."

"No matter what your faith was before you got there, when your organization becomes more aware of spirituality through practice, and working with communities, you benefit."

LESSON 3 SPIRITUAL PROGRAMS BRING A SENSE OF INTERNAL WHOLENESS TO PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

For many people spirituality plays an important role in their ability to cope with crisis, illness, loss, or other life transitions. Organizations that implement spirituality programs throughout the larger community remarked that their programs encourage participants to explore spiritual issues alongside other people grappling with similar life challenges. In addition to providing a safe space to discuss their spirituality, and/or learn practices, these programs cultivate an extended network of support for program participants.

“We deal with destitute young women with kids... it’s different than mental health counseling. What our staff brings to these clients is a sense of internal wholeness, and you can’t put a price on that. I may know the dollars and cents of what it costs to have a client in our shelter, but not what it takes to heal that spirit. We are having a true impact on the world through this funding.”

LESSON 4 CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SPIRITUALITY ENHANCE THE COMPETENCY OF THOSE IN THE HELPING PROFESSIONS

Spirituality plays a central role in how people understand their life’s circumstances, and it is often the lens through which they seek meaning and purpose in life. Those in the helping professions are expected to be able to identify with their clients, regardless of differences in culture, language, or gender, and non-profit organizations work diligently to acquire the skills needed to understand and support diverse populations. However, according to Gathering participants, many professionals charged with supporting people during troubled periods are ill-equipped to adequately respond to a client’s spiritual needs. Through spiritual programs funded by The Angell Foundation, participants were given the opportunity to discover specific approaches for supporting clients with different spiritual beliefs, and to learn to refrain from imposing their own beliefs on others. These programs helped participants understand how to tend to the holistic needs of their clients, be they spiritual or non-spiritual.

“We talked about the differences between religion and spirituality, and how diversity affects the way in which healthcare providers work with patients, especially patients and families going through a loss.”

LESSON 5 INTEGRATING SPIRITUALITY INTO ORGANIZATIONS REQUIRES DILIGENCE AND COMMITMENT, AND IS WORTH THE EFFORT

A positive internal work environment was repeatedly noted as one of the benefits of bringing spirituality into the work place, however, all participants agreed that the process “was very intense and provocative.” Reorienting and strengthening an organization is a difficult task not to be taken lightly. Cultivating this focus “requires time and attention,” noted a participant.

“Life is often uncomfortable, and we spend a lot of time trying to make the uncomfortable comfortable, but being present in the process was an amazing learning and teaching experience. Ultimately we were strengthened as individuals and as a whole.”

“Living in spirituality is not comfortable sometimes. If spirituality comes out of a sense of hospitality, there’s a consequence to letting others in who aren’t like me. It challenges me.”

Organizational spirituality is not about religion, and has nothing to do with the mandatory presence of specific religious beliefs in the workplace. It is about nurturing an organizational culture where shared values are implemented throughout all facets of the organization’s operations, and providing employees with tools to assist them in finding greater meaning in their work. Thus, with a laser focus and a shared commitment to spiritual growth, organizations can experience dramatic improvements in the health of their organization. The Foundation believes that organizations that effectively tend to their spiritual core have the potential to create positive and lasting ripple effects throughout the communities they serve.

KEY QUESTIONS

HOW DO SPIRITUALITY PROGRAMS DIFFER FROM TRADITIONAL ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES?

Based on the experiences of Angell Foundation grantees, it appears that both strategies should be developed in tandem in order for an organization to perform at its best. Initiatives in organizational development customarily involve the creation of strategies designed to help the organization meet its business objectives. This process is typically a top-down approach overseen by management, and usually focuses on the technical, procedural, and financial aspects of an organization. Organizational spirituality, on the other hand, emphasizes how an organization’s vision and values are embodied in both their internal and external activities. Beyond improving organizational output, a primary goal of organizational spirituality is the creation of a climate of support that enables employees to derive a greater sense of purpose from their work, and to align their personal values with those of the organization. These processes can range from the simple to the complex, but all are rooted in the belief that people are an organization’s most important resource.

“I can’t relate to the idea of spirituality as non-essential. This initiative helped transform our organization and reflect on critical questions we’d been struggling with for years. No other foundation is looking at nurturing spirituality skills, yet that’s the piece that brought it all together for us and helped our organization to operate at its full potential.”

WHY SHOULD YOUR ORGANIZATION INCORPORATE A SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE INTO ITS OPERATIONS?

The Foundation grantees reported that focusing on spirituality had a transformative effect on their organizations. Reports from board members and executive directors overwhelmingly affirm that their process resulted in improved relationships throughout their organization. Staff report that they felt acknowledged, listened to, and supported in meeting their personal and professional goals. As stated by a Gathering participant, “creating places that are psychologically and emotionally safe, using council practices, and focusing on intentionality,” can serve to increase the quality of harmony necessary for an organization to work smoothly. However, these benefits do not come easily. All grantees agree that cultivating spiritual awareness within an organization requires significant work and a solid commitment from everyone involved.

A Gathering participant pointed out that ritual can be a turn-off for many people; nonetheless, non-denominational workplace rituals, such as beginning meetings with a moment of silence, can help create an environment where learning and growth can take place.

“To create energy and openness you have to walk with people and be open, continually checking each other’s pulses”

“There’s a tension between doing and being. Here, we are honoring being, but what’s honored out there is doing, and we find ourselves in a clash. BlackBerry’s are about doing, but meditation and spirituality are being. We honor our being, and that’s the spark of excitement we feel.”

Other strategies, including retreats, facilitated dialogues, and workplace practices such as meditation and deep listening, were cited as galvanizing activities that can help begin the process of spiritual transformation for an organization.

HOW CAN A FOUNDATION THAT DOES NOT HAVE A SPECIFICALLY DESIGNATED SPIRITUALITY GRANT PROGRAM FUND SPIRITUALLY ORIENTED INITIATIVES?

It is not necessary for a foundation to have a primary focus on spirituality in order to encourage its constituency to embark upon processes of self-reflection and inquiry; in fact, many of the organizations that received spirituality grants from The Angell Foundation did not identify themselves as spiritually or religiously based. Despite their orientation, however, all shared a desire to improve the internal culture of their organization, clarify their mission, and renew their commitment to employees and clients. This space within an organization, where vision and values are implicitly aligned, is what we call spirituality. Regardless of its focus, any foundation with an interest in strengthening this aspect of the organizations that it funds can provide grants that encourage it. This encouragement can take many forms: grants, for example, that are earmarked to fund facilitators skilled at helping organizations embark on a process of self-reflection; or, stipends for individuals to participate in existing spiritual programs.

PARTICIPANTS AT THE GATHERING ON SPIRITUALITY OFFERED THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FOUNDATIONS INTERESTED IN SUPPORTING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN DIVERSE ORGANIZATIONS:

Provide grants for organizations to hold regular retreats.

Provide grants that encourage grantees to engage all levels of their organizations in group dialogues.

Provide grants geared towards the prevention of burn-out for those in the helping professions.

Provide grants for the integration of spirituality and social justice work in the larger community.

Simplify the grant process and reporting requirements in order to decrease the load on already overworked staff.

A Gathering participant commented that “spirituality occurs in a place of uncertainty that can be threatening, and many of us fill up that place of uncertainty with paperwork. If organization directors request one less piece of paperwork everyday from those reporting to them, a subtle shift can take place.”

Provide flexibility in determining how these types of grants are structured, implemented and evaluated.

Fund holistic programs within communities/populations undergoing difficult experiences, and/or transitions.

Provide multi-year funding.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

It’s been said that, “we are not human beings in search of a spiritual experience, but spiritual beings having a human experience.” This observation alludes to the fact that we are not bodies separate from our souls, or minds disconnected from matters of the heart; all life is interconnected and interdependent. The Angell Foundation’s spirituality funding seeks to nurture this holistic view of the human experience and to support people in their quest for inner growth, self-transformation, and deeper relationships. The Foundation believes that spirituality can enhance people’s lives in a multitude of ways - socially, emotionally, personally, and professionally - and have a transformative effect in the workplace and in communities. The findings of the Gathering on Spirituality have reinforced the Foundation’s belief in the value of funding in this area.

“Funding is how we keep score in this society, and how we remind ourselves of what matters. Focusing on spirituality can feel self-indulgent, but you could also ask if it’s worthwhile to spend money on flowers, or take time for silence. If it affects the quality of our interactions with others then we have our answer right there.”

The Foundation challenges you to consider how you can incorporate spiritual values in your philanthropic/programmatic goals.

Many people and organizations have supported and offered their guidance to The Angell Foundation during our journey into spirituality grantmaking. We extend our deepest gratitude to our Advisory Committee and the numerous people who participated in our initial planning focus groups for their kindness, wisdom and support throughout the first phases of our initiatives. We are especially indebted to John Ott, who along with his partner, Rose Pinard helped us to shape and implement our Organizational Spirituality initiative and facilitated the spirituality retreats and Gathering. We appreciate Holy Spirit Retreat Center, La Casa de Maria and Treepeople for providing sacred spaces in which we could pursue this important work. Lastly, we thank the leadership, staff and clients of each and every organization that we have had the opportunity to partner with as they implement their spirituality programs. We thank you for your abundant graciousness and for having the courage to openly partner with us as we learn more about this field.

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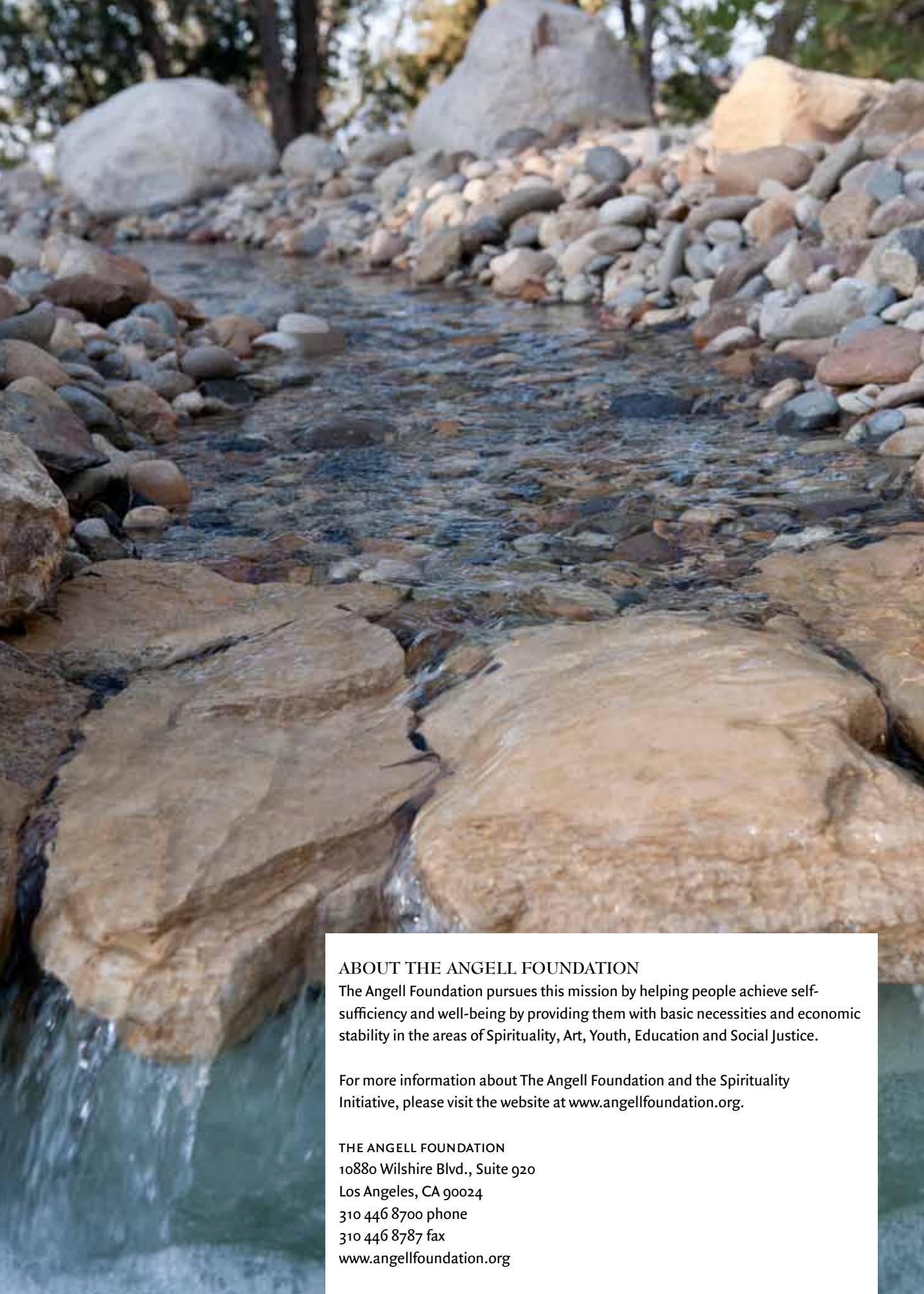
Transcription by EVELYN HUGHES

Design by VICTORIA LAM

Photographs by DAN ELDRIDGE

Printed at CLEAR IMAGE PRINTING

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ABOUT THE ANGELL FOUNDATION

The Angell Foundation pursues this mission by helping people achieve self-sufficiency and well-being by providing them with basic necessities and economic stability in the areas of Spirituality, Art, Youth, Education and Social Justice.

For more information about The Angell Foundation and the Spirituality Initiative, please visit the website at www.angellfoundation.org.

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