

Struggle of LOVE

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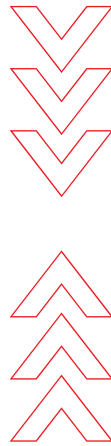
ANNUAL REPORT

20
23



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The Struggle of Love Foundation (SOLF) is a 501(c)3 Colorado non-profit organization dedicated to fostering community awareness, involvement, togetherness, and positive social activities for youth, adults, and families through a diverse range of essential programs and resources. Our overarching vision is to promote and create holistic lifestyles by focusing on mentorship, intervention, prevention, health, and wellness. The foundation's core values, encompassing Communication, Integrity, Accountability, Inclusivity, Love, Fun, Forgiveness, and Growth, form the guiding principles for our work.

The youth and families in Denver and Aurora are in need, facing increasing challenges in the current socio-economic landscape. As life becomes more demanding for working individuals, the resulting stresses on children intensify, leading to heightened levels of anxiety, trauma, misbehavior, and depression, even among the very young. The community's children and youth are reaching out for assistance, signaling a call for help.

In response, SOLF is committed to providing life-saving services grounded in the social determinants of health, healing justice, mentorship, cultural affirmation, and nonviolence solutions for youth and families in the community. Our youth programs, such as the Spreading Our Love Mentor & Leadership Program for at-risk youth and young adults, focus on character-building, accountable decision-making, responsible civic participation, financial literacy, college-career readiness, peer support, and other essential life skills.

The organization extends its impact through programs and services encompassing gang intervention and prevention, mental health services, organized sports competitions, civic engagement projects, live events promoting community wellbeing, and a food pantry operating every Monday-Friday. In 2023, we engaged with over 6,000 youth participants across our various programs. Established in 2000 by Joel and LaKeshia Hodge, the Struggle of Love Foundation officially became a nonprofit organization in 2008.

A MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDERS JOEL AND LAKESHIA HODGE

We are delighted and optimistic as I present the 2023 annual report for the Struggle of Love Foundation. This past year marked a period of significant growth and expanded impact for our organization. We notably enhanced our mental health department, providing an increased number of free therapy sessions to those in need within our communities. Our presence in local schools expanded, allowing us to make a more direct positive impact on youth during their school days. Moreover, we innovatively engaged young people and families in our programs, offering even more enriching activities and essential learning opportunities.

The inauguration of the LOVE Center in Aurora on Colfax and Dayton stands as a monumental achievement, enabling the organization to extend its crucial community building programs and services to additional communities in need. The unwavering dedication of our supporters is truly commendable, as their belief in the mission of spreading more love has played a pivotal role in the foundation's success.

As we eagerly anticipate the coming year, may it bring further progress, success, and positive impact. The inspiring commitment of our team to build stronger communities of care and compassion is noteworthy, and we express gratitude for the collective effort in making a difference through the Struggle of Love Foundation. Here's to another year of transformative work and community building!



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Showing
our love to
save our
lives.

OUR MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

Who is Struggle of Love Foundation?

Struggle of Love Foundation (SOLF) is a 501(c)3 Colorado non-profit organization. Founded by LaKeshia and Joel Hodge in 2000, Struggle of Love Foundation is a BIPOC-led and BIPOC-founded organization, and a beacon for Black Excellence in Denver and Aurora. SOLF provides community awareness, involvement, educational, and enrichment activities for youth and families. SOLF addresses the social determinants of health and promotes healthy lifestyles.

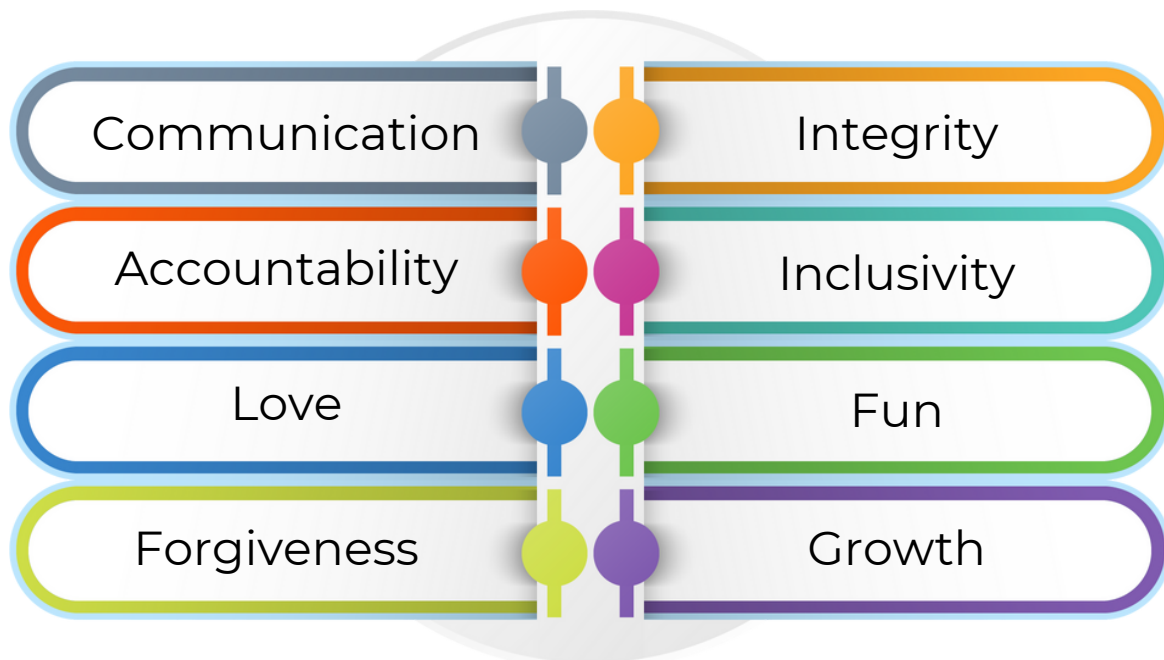
Our Mission:

To provide community awareness, involvement, togetherness, and positive social activities for youth, adults, and families through a variety of essential programs and resources.

Our Vision:

A holistic and healthy lifestyle in Northeast Denver and North Aurora through free access to mentorship, violence prevention, mental health, community events, sports wellness, and healthy food access.

Our Values:



OUR PROGRAMS

The Struggle of Love Foundation is committed to enhancing the well-being of individuals and communities in need through a range of programs and support services. Our initiatives are crafted to tackle urgent social issues and offer assistance to those who require it the most. Whether it's through education and health initiatives or community development projects, our goal is to create a substantial impact on the lives of those we aim to serve. Through strategic collaboration with local organizations and the generous contributions of our donors, we are empowered to fulfill our mission and instill hope in the lives of those facing challenges.

Spreading Our Love Mentor & Leadership Program



This program features a thorough curriculum designed to integrate the life skills we impart into the daily lives of youth and young adults. Both Mentorship and Leadership protégés pledge to engage in 30 hours of annual community activities across various platforms. This commitment fosters an appreciation for the significance of contributing to one's community, emphasizes the importance of pursuing education, developing job-related skills, building self-esteem and confidence, and cultivating a holistic and healthy lifestyle.

Mental Health Services

The Struggle of Love Foundation provides each program participant with 10 complimentary in-person psychological therapy sessions annually. These sessions take place at the LOVE center and are facilitated by licensed and certified mental health professionals. The services offered encompass one-on-one, couples, as well as family and group therapy sessions.

Secondary Youth Violence Prevention

Secondary Youth Violence Prevention is specifically crafted to prevent youth from entering gangs, focusing on those who have not yet become involved. Nevertheless, some referred youths may have taken an initial step towards gang involvement or affiliation with a violent group. SOLF staff engage in direct intervention, while also making referrals and connections to other gang intervention programs through collaborative efforts with community partners.



Sacks of Love Food Pantry

While collaborating with young individuals and their families, we observed a consistent rise in hunger and food insecurity. Motivated to make a positive impact, SOLF took initiative. In 2018, we joined forces with food justice organizations such as Food Bank of the Rockies to launch the Sacks of Love Food Pantry. Every weekday afternoon, we distribute a diverse range of food to more than 400 households in the local community every week.

Boots on the Ground

We engage with local area schools, collaborating with teachers and administrators to foster a positive impact on interactions and the overall school environment. This program is founded on (1) the integration of empirical research and practical experience, (2) a track record of balanced, comprehensive, and community-based approaches to public safety, (3) the numerous achievements of the Struggle of Love Foundation, and (4) the potential for coordination and collaboration facilitated by the SOLF Foundation and its community partners. This initiative partners with advocacy groups such as the Gang Rescue and Support Project, GRID, and the Youth Violence Prevention Act.



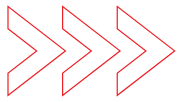
Violence Interruption

The Struggle of Love Foundation (SOLF) partners with Community Violence Solutions (CVS) to tackle conflicts that may arise among groups and/or individuals. Gang Outreach Specialists, also known as violence interrupters, are deployed through an extensive referral system, reaching out to individuals at risk. Our team establishes trust by fostering authentic relationships and identifies potential threats and areas of tension. In the year 2023, SOLF staff promptly responded to 90 shooting incidents and engaged in an additional 77 referral interventions.



Night Moves

In collaboration with Denver Parks and Recreation, The Struggle of Love Foundation spearheads the Night Moves program tailored for teenagers in the Montbello, Green Valley Ranch, and Aurora communities. Conducted every Friday from 6:00 to 9:00 pm throughout 2023, the program featured activities such as open gym time and organized basketball tournaments. Cash prizes were frequently granted to Night Moves participants, providing both incentive and recognition. This initiative played a crucial role in steering at-risk and high-risk teens away from violence and gang involvement, offering them a constructive and enjoyable outlet. In 2023, Night Moves reached 1,111 youth across 144 Fridays of programming.



Workforce Development



We connect young individuals to valuable job skills training and employment prospects in various settings. Through long-term partnerships with Coors Field and Empower Field, our youth gain hands-on experience working at concession stands during live events. Additionally, our Sacks of Love Food Pantry serves as a training ground for participants to learn about inventory management, data collection, client service, and teamwork. Our collaboration with ARC Thrift Stores, the Denver Youth Employment Program, and the Denver Elections Commission to provide further employment opportunities. Our Kidz Kreations Ice Cream Business places youth at the forefront of entrepreneurship, teaching them about supply chain management, marketing, sales, production, and financial aspects of running a small business. Through these diverse workforce development initiatives, we empower our youth with the skills, experience, and confidence necessary to succeed in their future careers.

Out of School Time Camps



SOLF is dedicated to offering high-quality year-round programming to children and families in need at no cost. In 2023, SOLF provided free camp for 25 underserved youth. Our Out-of-School Time (OST) programs contribute to the reduction of youth violence in Denver by:

- Ensuring that youth have a secure, consistent, and supervised space during non-school hours.
- Facilitating connections between young individuals and trained professionals within a positive environment.
- Offering essential mental health support to foster robust character development.

Support Team Assisted Response (STAR) Partnership



The Struggle of Love Foundation is honored to collaborate with Denver's Support Team Assisted Response (STAR) program, dedicated to providing behavioral health support and social services to community members in need. Operating under the umbrella of Denver's health department, the STAR van pairs a clinician with an EMT to respond to low-risk crisis calls redirected from 911. With compassion and cultural awareness, they assist residents dealing with challenges such as substance abuse, homelessness, and mental health issues. Given the growing demand surpassing their capacity, STAR engages the Struggle of Love Foundation to handle additional cases with care and expertise. In the year 2023 alone, the foundation supported 85 clients referred by STAR, delivering tailored resources and trauma-informed, judgment-free support.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT: SPREADING OUR LOVE MENTOR & LEADERSHIP

In 2023, the Struggle of Love Foundation experienced substantial growth in our Spreading Our Love Mentor and Leadership Program, seamlessly integrated into several local area schools. This past year, we extended our services to students in six different schools, encompassing both in-school and after-school programs.

These educational institutions comprised Charter Academy, Elevate Academy, Hallett Academy, John Amesse Elementary, McGlone Academy, and Byers Middle & High School. Engaging with a total of 135 students in grades K-12 across all schools, our team of eight skilled facilitators delivered over 100 hours of programming per month. Through interactive lessons, courageous conversations, and relationship-building, our programs empower students to cultivate confidence, resilience, and strategies for overcoming interpersonal conflicts and life's challenges. Notably, at McGlone Academy and Elevate Academy, students in our mentoring and leadership group dedicated themselves to raising their GPAs and preparing for high school, resulting in several success stories of substantial academic and personal growth.

Beyond the school year, we hosted two camps—one in the summer and one in the winter. These camps offered enriching activities over eight summer weeks and two winter weeks, benefiting 25 students each. The activities encompassed dance, art, sports, music, and more.

As our student leaders mature, they are actively contributing by organizing community events, such as the Sol & Salsa Festival, to celebrate diversity. Some teenagers even developed business plans and branding for their own clothing lines. Witnessing these young individuals grow in compassion, character, and capability through engagement in our program is truly remarkable. We eagerly anticipate expanding our impact with students, families, and schools in the upcoming year.



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT: SACKS OF LOVE FOOD PANTRY

The Sacks of Love Food Pantry, which started in 2018, remains a vital resource in addressing food insecurity within Denver's Montbello neighborhood. In 2023, the pantry distributed over 1 million pounds of nutritious and culturally relevant food, reaching more than 125,000 individuals from 15,713 families. Many recipients frequented the pantry multiple times per week. Sustained by donations and the dedication of over 100 volunteers who contributed 12,000 hours in 2023, the pantry also provided community service opportunities for 39 individuals, totaling over 8,000 hours. While 60% of recipients are seniors over the age of 60, the pantry serves community members of all ages and backgrounds. Sacks of Love remains committed to its mission, forging stronger partnerships and continuing to extend dignity, hope, and compassion to anyone facing hunger.

1,034,600 Pounds of Food Distributed

Total Individuals Served **125,704** and **15,713** families



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT: VIOLENCE INTERRUPTION

Youth violence is a multifaceted social issue, exhibiting variations based on age, levels of gang involvement, and the severity of offenses. Risk factors influencing the likelihood of engaging in violent behavior span family, school, peer, and community contexts. Recognizing the complexity of this issue, the Struggle of Love Foundation adopts a comprehensive approach, understanding that a singular program or strategy working in isolation is unlikely to have a sustained impact on reducing gang activity.

Our foundation is dedicated to addressing violence within communities through diverse approaches and channels. We aim to foster peace in neighborhoods by tailoring our outreach and interventions to meet the specific needs of individuals involved in or affected by interpersonal violence. SOLF Secondary Prevention Specialists acknowledge the nuanced nature of this challenge and focus on reducing the probability of youth joining gangs, particularly those who have displayed early signs of problematic behavior or are exposed to multiple known risk factors for violent activities.

These services typically involve individual risk assessments and primarily target youth aged 10 to 24 years and their families, with a particular emphasis on younger siblings and family members of gang-involved youth. Collaborating closely with school administrators, probation officers, police departments, and other community leaders, our Secondary Prevention Specialists identify high-risk individuals. In 2023, we were embedded within six Denver schools. Our specialists invite them to participate in our programs, encompassing organized recreational activities, mental health therapy sessions, roundtable discussions, mentor partnerships, job readiness training, employment opportunities, and various social activities.

Additionally, we excel in providing gang awareness training for school personnel, parents, and students, emphasizing the dangers associated with gang involvement.

OUTREACH EVENT HIGHLIGHTS:

REACH 4 PEACE PICNIC

The Reach 4 Peace Picnic stands as a yearly gathering that unites local businesses and organizations, aiming to educate the community, provide free food and activities, and honor exceptional fathers. Featuring health screenings, non-profit booths, and the acknowledgment of Father of the Year award winners, this event fosters community awareness and unity. The realization of this event is made possible through the combined support of individual donors, city grants, and contributions from private foundations. Looking ahead, we aspire to broaden the scope and impact of this event in 2023 and beyond.

Father of the Year Awardees:

- Cory Tyler nominated by Wife Amber
- Sergio Covarrubias nominated by Shawn Selman
- Ronnell Jackson nominated by Dionna C Harding



OUTREACH EVENT HIGHLIGHTS:

BACKPACK GIVEAWAY

The Struggle of Love Foundation successfully organized its annual Backpack Giveaway event once again. This initiative aims to equip students in need with the necessary tools for success in the classroom, ensuring that every child has the resources required to fulfill their potential. In the current year, we distributed more than 1,500 backpacks and essential school supplies to students in 12 local schools. The foundation remains steadfast in its commitment to preparing students for enriching and productive school experiences.

NEED TO FEED:

In 2023, The Struggle of Love Foundation collaborated with the Families Forward Resource Center and the Montbello Organizing Committee to launch the inaugural "Need to Feed" Thanksgiving food basket giveaway. During the week before Thanksgiving 2023, local area families received one Thanksgiving meal box each. This giveaway aimed to support those in need by providing resources for a delicious and fulfilling Thanksgiving meal, bringing joy and comfort to families during the holiday season. Each box included ample turkey meat and side dishes to cater to the entire family. Over 1,000 families received a Thanksgiving food boxes.

A TIME TO GIVE

The Struggle of Love Foundation successfully organized its annual "A Time to Give" toy giveaway event, spreading joy and hope to children in need. Inviting over 300 children aged 0-12 to attend and receive toys, the event took place in a safe and friendly atmosphere, ensuring a warm and welcoming environment for all participants. The foundation's overarching goal is to infuse the magic of the holiday season into the lives of as many children as possible, and thanks to generous donations and contributions, this aspiration became a reality in 2023, with over 3,000 toys distributed.

OUR TEAM



Founder & Executive Director

LaKeshia Hodge



Founder & Program Director

Joel Hodge



Love Center Manager

Ayanna Johnson



Violence Interruption
Secondary Youth Violence
Prevention Specialist

Jason McBride



Secondary Youth Violence
Prevention Specialist / School
Program Lead

Rodney Bates



Violence Interruption
Secondary Youth Violence
Prevention Specialist

Shannon Richardson



Violence Interruption
Secondary Youth Violence
Prevention Specialist



Sacks of Love Lead

Enrique Salas-Carrasco



Sacks of Love Assistant

Cletus Williams

OUR TEAM



STAR Deputy Director

Dini Hodge



STAR Program Director

Elon Hodge -Jones



Mental Wellness Community Liaison

Ashley Smith



Mental Health Clinical Director

Betsy Chanth, MSW, LCSW



Mental Health Therapist

Claudia Kouakou, LPCC



OST Program Coordinator

Lynn King-Jackson



OST Program Facilitator

Ulises Villa

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers play a pivotal role in the work we undertake. In every aspect of our organization and across all our programs, we depend on committed volunteers to carry out our mission. We engage both general community volunteers and individuals fulfilling court-ordered community service to contribute to our initiatives.

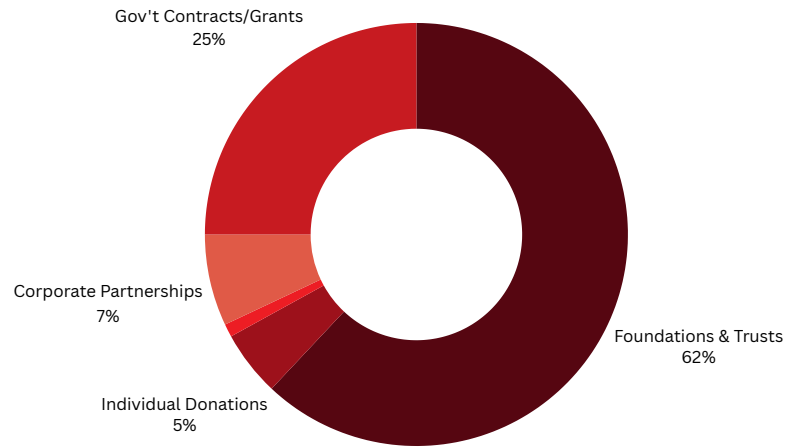
167 Active Volunteers

Total Volunteer Hours 12,060

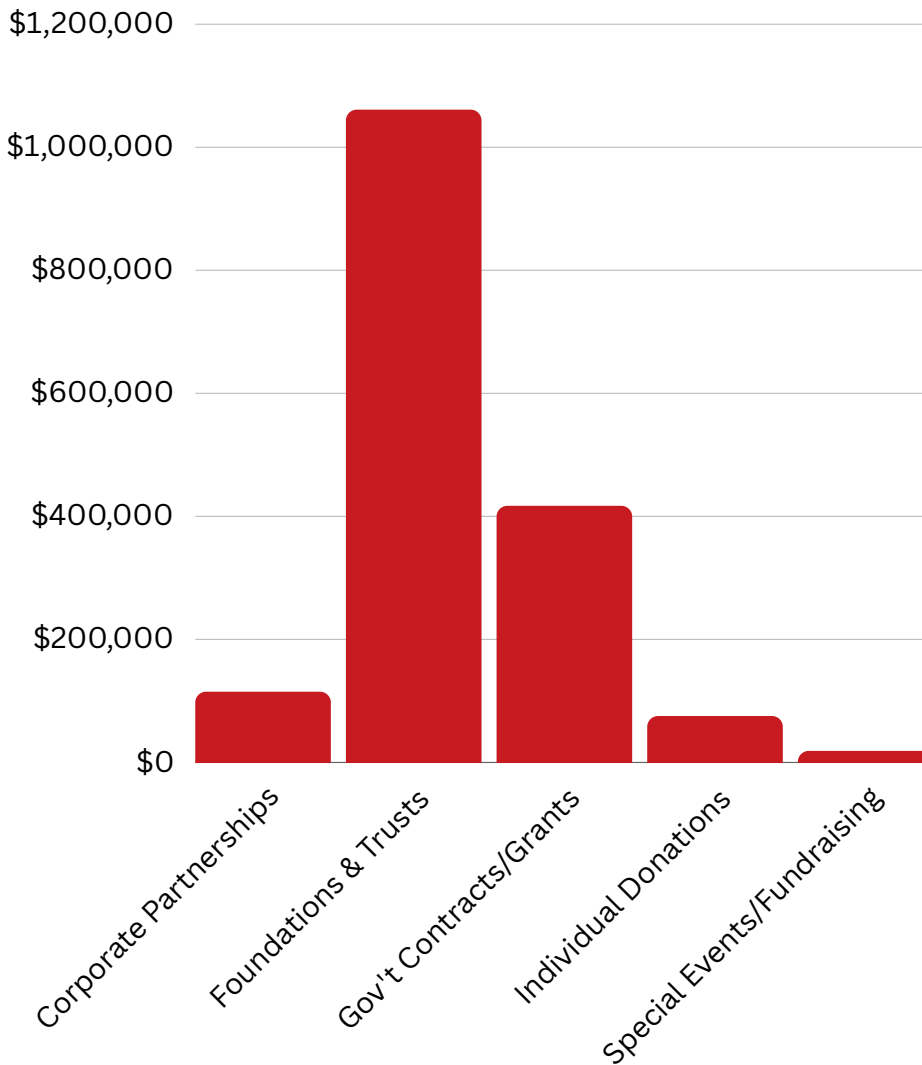


FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Funding Breakdown



Funding by Type



SOLF depends on a diverse array of corporate, government, and individual contributors to advance our mission. Through their support, we can carry out our efforts to foster peace and prosperity in neighborhoods across Denver and Aurora.

OUR IMPACT:

Over the course of the 2022-2023 school years, the Struggle of Love Foundation provided support to seven school sites in diverse capacities. Our approach involves collaborating with each school site to tailor programs that align with their unique school culture. This collaborative effort extends to working directly within schools and also at the SOLF LOVE Center.



700+ STUDENTS SERVED

BIPOC PARTICIPANTS 98%

15,700 STUDENT CONTACTS
for Mentoring and Leadership

INDIVIDUALS SERVED 151
for mental health services

1,034,600 POUNDS OF FOOD
Distributed through
Sacks of Love Food Pantry



WORKING ACROSS 19 ZIP CODES

EMBEDDED WITHIN 12 LOCAL SCHOOLS



COMMUNITY PARTNERS

We collaborate with the following organizations and community leaders to advance our mission. These partnerships not only enable the success of our existing programs but also help identify future opportunities for our organization and participants. The dedication and resources provided by our community partners are integral to our work, and we continually seek additional meaningful partnerships within the diverse sectors where our programs operate.



COMMUNITY SUPPORTERS

Struggle of Love Foundation thrives thanks to generous support from the following organizations and entities, in addition to other foundations, local businesses, and individual donors



The Colorado Health Foundation™



COLORADO



The Denver Foundation



STAY IN TOUCH



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