The Community Foundation & The Tale of the Transformational Leader
Once upon a time, in 2008, The Community Foundation got a case of the “impatience”.

Being impatient isn’t exactly like chicken pox or poison ivy, but it does cause itching and discomfort. The foundation saw big challenges in the data from our TRENDS Report—and some weren’t getting addressed in a comprehensive way. That made us squirm.
We have always been—and remain—committed to providing resources for local nonprofits already doing good work. But we itched to do more. We wanted to get issues resolved, hear people talking about what matters, and see resources being used strategically. **We wanted to initiate work on unaddressed problems.**

We wanted to be **TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERS!**
We dreamed of superhero-caliber results, but we couldn’t find the Bat Cave—or even a magic wand. So we proceeded like other mortals do.

We began to tell our story. We consulted with thought leaders and teachers and elected officials. We looked for people with good brains, people with children and people with businesses, people with important experiences, people with passion and voices and ideas, and people who knew other people.

We asked everyone we knew to listen, to pay attention, and to join us if they could.

Even if you don’t have super powers, it turns out that time, commitment, and yes, money can help solve problems.

The medicine for our bad case of “impatience,” back in 2008, was to launch a campaign for our Community Trust Fund. This fund supports both essential work being done by our local nonprofits and provides resources for us to be a Transformational Leader.

Despite some pretty unfortunate economic events, we set a goal of $4 million in 4 years. With the help of thousands in the community, we reached that goal this past September. Yay you! Yay us!

Together, we were more powerful than a locomotive.
One of the most concerning stories in our county is about our achievement gap—the term that we use to describe the difference in school test scores between kids growing up in poverty and their more well-off peers. The gap is really big—one of the largest in Colorado. We were shocked to learn, for example, that if you grow up in poverty in Boulder Valley, your chances of reading at grade level by 3rd grade are only 55 percent. On the other hand, if your parents make $30,000 or more annually, your chances are 90 percent.

We’ve been tracking this data for 14 years, and the numbers seemed to be getting worse, not better. We asked ourselves, what would Superman do?

We couldn’t find a way to leap over tall buildings in a single bound, but we thought hard about how to be strategic, how to have impact, how to do a lot with not very much. We thought hard about how to support the most promising efforts, how to build sustainable funding sources, and how to move the needle.

We raised money and began to implement a plan to help all kids in Boulder County arrive at school ready to learn.

Is this, we wondered, what it means to be a Transformational Leader?
Once you start dreaming like a superhero, a lot seems possible. It gave us vision (not x-ray, but still), and then we asked: **what do we want our community to look like?**
The achievement gap isn’t the only challenge our community faces.

For one thing, we’d like Boulder County to have a greater culture of giving. We learned some time ago that we weren’t giving as generously as our peers around the state and the country. How could we be **Transformational Leaders and work for change?**

The Foundation launched the “Culture of Giving” movement, beginning the bounce of the little yellow balls to remind people “Giving is Ball—pass it on!”

Our work in this area is making a difference—the Culture of Giving has influenced increased giving in Boulder County, but there’s plenty more room for leadership.

Another vision we have is about a more inclusive community. Although 25 percent of our county identify as people of color, nonprofit staffs and boards don’t reflect that. Our Expanding Leadership Initiative and Leadership Fellows programs were designed to chip away at the boundaries limiting us from having a more reflective and inclusive leadership locally.
Most of the money we raised through The Community Trust was meant to double the support we can give to local nonprofits that are already doing a really good job. And we are so grateful for the many, many gifts we’ve received to support that.

But we have learned that Transformational Leadership is a long-term commitment. Just tying on the superhero cape isn’t enough. The achievement gap and inclusivity, like most really complex community problems, would have already been fixed if there was an easy solution. No matter how badly we’re itching to see change, we can’t move as fast as a speeding bullet.

It will take time and resources to get the results we want.

If you like our story at The Community Foundation, and if you like the story we envision for our community, please support the foundation, and help us intensify our transformational leadership efforts. So we can keep working towards Happily Ever After.

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