



Date: September 24, 2019

To: T Mobile ChangeMaker Challenge

From: Jane Gommernann, Founder & President  
Orphans and Widows of Omaha

Topic: Joseph Zhong - T Mobile ChangeMaker Challenge

Please allow me to introduce myself, I am the Founder and Executive Director of Orphans and Widows of Omaha we are a 501 C 3 Non Profit providing support and service to young adults transitioning to independence from foster care and the widowed of all ages.

I am writing this letter of recommendation on behalf of Joseph Zhong, a young adult and student at Millard North High School, Omaha, Ne. I first met Joseph through an email request, he was reaching out to our community on behalf of the elderly. He was collecting gifts for Heritage Ridge senior center in Bellevue, Ne. during November of 2018. My organization donated quilted gift bags to be shared with the widowed residents of the center. Since this request aligned with our mission we were happy to participate.

I thought our donation was the end of our engagement, I was wrong. One day during the holiday season I received a knock on my door. I answered to find that Joseph had made a hand made wreath as a thank you for our donations. I then received an email with the links for the performance. After watching these U-Tube videos I knew I had not seen the last of Joseph.

As the Exec Director I am hands on with all volunteers, coordinators and organizations we support. For one so young Joseph does amazing work. I wish there were more volunteers like Joseph. From the moment Joseph is engaged with a project the event is flawless.

I have contacted Joseph on a number of occasions, to ask if he would organize events for Elk Ridge Village. Orphans and Widows hosts monthly get togethers and Joseph's group is perfect for special occasions. With the dates and times locked down I can leave the rest up to Joseph. I am always provided with an agenda, outline and volunteers. Joseph prepares the music, organizes the musicians, practices and prepares to provide amazing events. Programs are handed out to all residents. (Approx. 75-100 participants enjoy the shows). Joseph not only demonstrates leadership with his youthful musicians but also with the elderly he serves. He engages them from beginning to end of each event. He shares his culture with others and offers opportunity for the community to learn more.

Orphans and Widows is a multi-generational, multi-cultural organization which makes Joseph a perfect fit for us. Joseph interacts with all ages, all cultures to ensure engagement. His musicians range in age from Kindergarten to College and his audience is 55-94. He engages the parents to volunteer and provide treats/gifts and drinks, serving each senior with dignity and grace. Joseph acts as MC for the events, as well as musician participant. What is so amazing about his performance is the flawless way in which Joseph moves through his many roles. The respect from his peers, their parents and other musicians is obvious. Joseph is gracious, kind, funny, engaging and all together a composed young man. The young musicians look to him with admiration and trust in their eyes.

It is difficult to convey in a letter just how skillfully he leads his young group of musicians. It is clear they had complete confidence in Joseph and trust him to support, encourage and keep them on track.

While engaging with him personally during the shows and after Joseph demonstrates a maturity far exceeding his age. He is articulate, kind, and humble, he defers praise and applause to his group and participants. Joseph demonstrates the best qualities of a leader, allowing those he leads to receive the adulations of the crowd. He graciously points out each individuals performance and beams at their accomplishments. Joseph is a unique young man. It is clear to see his impact goes well beyond the immediate performance, he positively guides young adults to reach for the stars while honoring the elderly participants with relevant conversation and a walk down memory lane. Seniors sing along and move with the music. Many stop to talk to the group and Joseph after the performance.

Joseph demonstrates, grace, humility, talent and leadership far beyond his years. He is touching our community one center and life at a time. I cannot wait to see where life takes him and all that he is capable to achieve. He is someone who should be encouraged and supported for he does the same for others. Of course he also provides our organization with a kind and thoughtful Thank you! You can find acknowledgement of such on our website. He is truly one of a kind,

I sincerely hope you consider Joseph for this **T Mobile ChangeMaker Challenge** as it will be an investment in our community, an amazing young adult and all the lives he touches.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have, please do not hesitate to reach out if necessary! We have already booked additional performances with Joseph and his group for the Winter! Please feel free to attend.

Best Regards,

*Jane Gommernann*

Founder - Orphans and Widows of Omaha



To Whom It May Concern:

It is my pleasure to recommend **Joseph Zhong** for the “**T Mobile ChangeMaker Challenge**”. I have known Joseph since I was Joseph's school orchestra teacher while he was in 4th and 5th grades. His dedication to his violin playing was always an inspiration to his peers. Joseph has had many years of private lessons with Ann Nagosky, a very fine violinist in the Omaha area. He has also been involved with the Omaha Area Youth Orchestras. He has continued to participate in Orchestra at school and plays in the top Orchestra at Millard North High School. Joseph has been volunteered with Omaha Symphony Christmas Celebration since 2012.

At school, Joseph created the **Dreams String Quartet**, his own student string quartet (two violinists, one violist, and one cellist). He also organized the **Joys Group** which consists of about thirteen music students who attend Millard Public Schools from age seven to sixteen who play violin, viola, cello, and piano. Joseph tutors the individual player first, and rehearses the violin group before each performance. These groups bring live music to Omaha Senior Living Communities. Some of the concerts occur prior to holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas. Another concert celebrated Valentine's Day & Chinese New Year. The students play a nice variety of musical selections such as Irish fiddle music, classical, popular, multi-cultural, patriotic, and holiday selections. Joseph has a wonderful way of connecting with the people attending as he speaks to them before each selection is played. The audience enjoys singing along on pieces familiar to them such as the Star-Spangled Banner or a Christmas Carol. Residents of the retirement communities have written notes expressing gratitude for the group's excellent playing. The music has brought a lot of happiness and joy to these people who might not go out for concerts or live performances. They encouraged them to come back in the future. **Several of my current and former Orchestra students are involved with the group.** I have noticed that their playing has really blossomed and that this **has had a positive effect that has spread zeal and excellence to the other Orchestra students in their class.** It is so amazing that Joseph has been able to facilitate the playing skills and love of music of so many young people.

Thank you for the opportunity to recommend an outstanding individual through “T Mobile ChangeMaker Challenge”. If you have questions or need further information, please contact me.

Camille Hinz  
Orchestra Teacher of Elementary & Middle School  
Abbott, Aldrich, Cottonwood, Kiewit