



women's lunch place

# STRATEGIC PLAN HIGHLIGHTS







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Dear WLP Community,

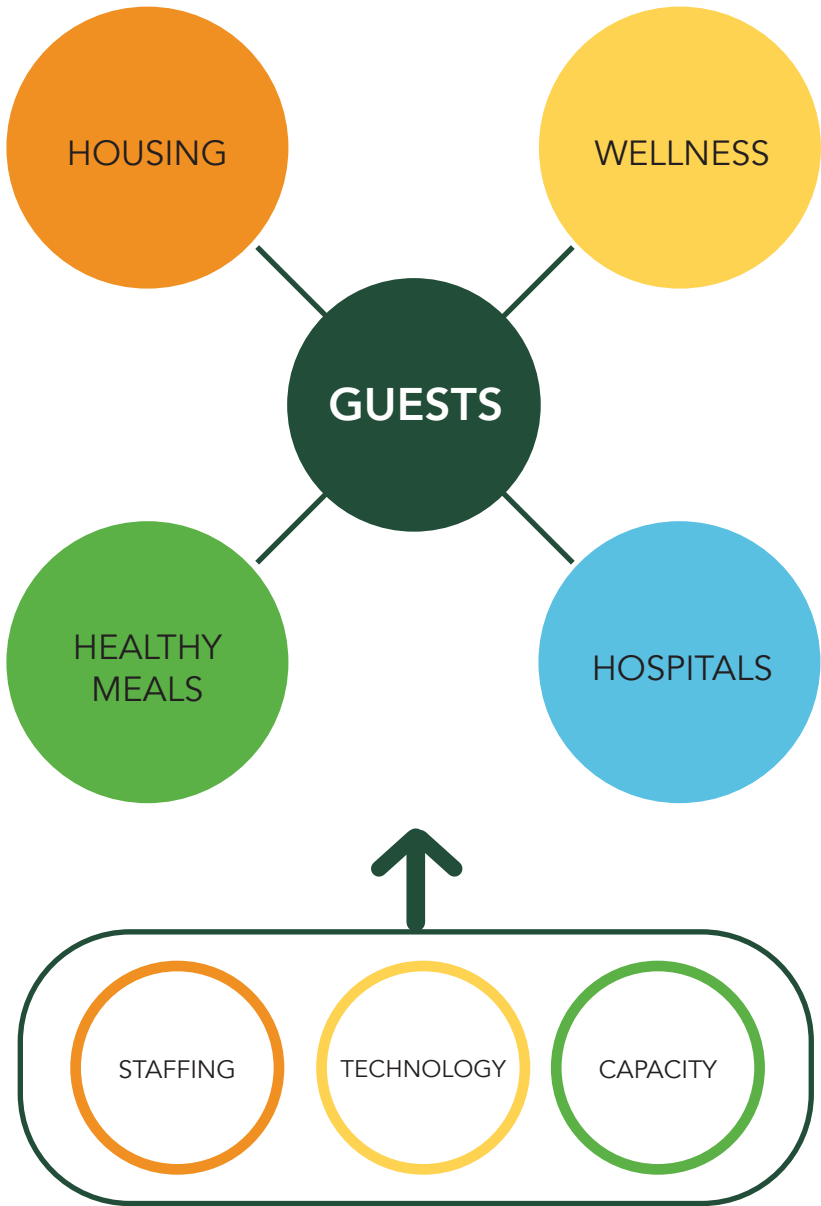
I am so pleased to present the highlights of the Women's Lunch Place 2021 Strategic Plan. Recognizing the gravity of the work we do to engage and uplift vulnerable women, the leadership and staff of WLP are excited about the opportunities we have to address gender and racial inequities, collaborate with other private and public agencies, and make permanent systems changes.

WLP is poised to broaden our impact and assertively confront the disproportionate impact of food insecurity, housing instability, and economic disenfranchisement on the physical and mental health of women. Over the past year, we have built a thoughtful and forward-looking talent strategy to meet the increasing demand for our unique, relationship-driven service model. We will continue to invest in staff hiring, training, and professional development.

We are exceedingly optimistic and grounded in the elemental belief that, in the words of Margaret Mead, "a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." I welcome your engagement as we together create that change.

Best,

# At a Glance



WLP's Strategic Plan focuses on building new programs and collaborations in four key areas:

- Housing – to expand access to housing opportunities and to increase critical stabilization services
- Wellness – to increase guest engagement to address their physical and emotional well-being
- Healthy Meals – to increase access to high quality meals and to further incorporate nutritional best practices
- Hospitals – to increase access to physical and mental health services

The plan also includes three supporting objectives:

- Staffing – to ensure best-in-class staff and services grounded in WLP culture
- Technology – to ensure the safe and efficient delivery of services and to measure the impact of investments
- Capacity – to analyze space and usage and identify potential alternatives to meet demand

## **MISSION**

Our mission remains centered on our guests and their individual pathways to stabilization. The strategic plan promotes a more proactive engagement in that mission to address food security, housing stability, and economic empowerment.

## **PROCESS**

The strategic plan is an iterative process, informed by what we will continue to learn and understand about our guests' needs. This knowledge will drive decisions around the infrastructure for our staff to respond to those needs.

## **A NOTE ON MENTAL HEALTH**

The mental health needs of our guests will be a crucial consideration in staff recruitment, training, and development, as well as the strengthening and building of related collaborative partnerships. Building in layers of clinical expertise underscores our commitment to meet this urgent crisis.



## Our Community



WLP guests are adult women living in extreme poverty of all ages, ethnicities, and life experiences from the Greater Boston area, including Dorchester, Roxbury, Mattapan, East Boston, South Boston, Cambridge, Somerville, Lynn, Chelsea, Revere, and Quincy. Ninety percent of WLP guests are single, unaccompanied women. We serve a significant number of transgender

women, many of whom feel unsafe in co-ed facilities and statistically are much more likely to be physically or sexually assaulted on the streets.

According to our most recent guest survey, 62% of our guests belong to minority populations, 58% report a history of domestic violence, 55% are age 55 or older, and 34% report drug or alcohol

91%

rely on food programs for nutrition

67%

struggle with fair to poor mental health

54%

struggle with fair to poor physical health

48%

unable to make payments on critical bills

55%

experienced decline in mental health specifically related to COVID

40%

grapple with rental arrearages

use disorders. Most of these women are insecurely housed or homeless in neighborhoods that have been hit hardest by healthcare, racial, and gender disparities.

In our community, 57% of women are homeless while others live in transitional, low-income, or subsidized housing. Many are insecurely housed and need stabilization services, emergency

financial assistance, and care coordination to prevent eviction. Eighty-four percent are currently unemployed, and 29% receive SSI or SSDI benefits. Most guests who are housed live alone and subsist on extremely low incomes. Those without homes stay in overnight shelters, though some choose the streets to avoid the overcrowded, loud, and, at times, unsafe shelters.

# The Strategic Plan

The pandemic required the staff at Women's Lunch Place to pivot at every turn to best serve our guests and the surrounding community in an ever-changing landscape. Pre-existing pressure on capacity across all program areas and the adept manner in which our staff responded to unprecedented challenges gave rise to the desire to create a Strategic Plan to ensure that Women's Lunch Place continues to build the expertise, programs, and partnerships needed to support our community of guests.

Over the course of six months, Women's Lunch Place engaged in a comprehensive strategic planning process. From the outset, it was determined that it would be a joint effort between the Board of Directors and staff at all levels – leadership through guest services – to ensure alignment between the governing body, the management team, and staff. In September 2021, the WLP Board unanimously approved the Strategic Plan which will guide the direction of WLP over the next three to five years.

## PROACTIVE APPROACH

WLP's service model is uniquely guest-centered, focusing on the specific needs of the individual woman and designing her own pathway to health. We help women break down the barriers to the social determinants of health to overcome racial, economic, and social disparities in our society. The Strategic Planning Committee recognized the tremendous reactive work the WLP staff performs every day assisting our guests in crisis; however, its goal was to envision proactive activities and collaborations to prevent, or limit the repercussions from, women falling into crisis. In this way, WLP can make a greater and more expansive impact.



## MISSION AND VISION

The Mission and Vision of Women's Lunch Place declare the purpose of our enterprise, energize our staff and stakeholders, and focus that power on both concrete actions and aspirational goals.

### Mission

Women's Lunch Place inspires hope and supports the development of self-sustaining skills for women experiencing hunger, homelessness, and poverty. We create a safe, welcoming day shelter community in which we respect the dignity of our guests. We build trusting relationships to provide individualized, integrated services focused on nutrition, health, housing, and economic empowerment.

### Vision

In the effort to eradicate hunger, homelessness, and poverty among women, Women's Lunch Place is a visionary, collaborative leader and partner in Greater Boston. With a unique, relationship-driven service model, we provide women with a path to self-sufficiency, improved health, housing, and financial stability.

## FOUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES TO AMPLIFY IMPACT

### Housing

*Build long-term collaborative relationships with low-income housing developers and landlords, and other public and private institutions with housing expertise, to provide easier pathways for our guests to secure housing; and provide stabilization services to tenants in low-income properties at risk of eviction.*

Lack of affordable housing in the City of Boston, particularly for women experiencing hunger, homelessness, and poverty, is an issue of increasing concern. The 2020 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to Congress documents that “the number of individuals with chronic patterns of homelessness increased by fifteen percent between 2019 and 2020.” This alarming increase is reflected in our community. Demand for our housing advocacy services has increased by over 40% in Q1 of FY2022. Our concerns about housing status are magnified by age and research showing accelerated physical declines among the homeless population. Histories of trauma, isolation, anxiety, depression, substance use disorders, and other health issues are barriers to women seeking to secure and maintain housing.

The benefits of keeping a woman housed are many; without stable housing, women lack the scaffolding to overcome the numerous barriers they face. It is far easier and less expensive to keep a woman housed than it is to find her new housing. Housing stability is a pillar of economic mobility for women, facilitating efforts to increase income through employment and access to benefits.

WLP has piloted a comprehensive housing stabilization program that provides structure, connections, and supportive services to break the cycle of chronic homelessness. The process is dynamic, so when a guest's stability is strengthened, the need for WLP's services decreases. Likewise, support increases with negative changes in status, such as missed rent payments. Advocates work in partnership with women to develop both formal and informal supports to ensure long-term housing success. These relationships are geared toward enhancing a woman's capacity to act independently and are purposely flexible to address the individual's needs over time.



## Wellness

*Develop an integrated Wellness Program that complements the Healthy Meals Program and incorporates relationships with medical service providers.*

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration recommends the development of effective strategies to increase overall emotional and physical well-being that help reduce substance use, lessen symptoms of mental illness, and improve the quality of life. Treatment and recovery for substance use disorder, serious mental illness, and serious emotional disturbance can vary based on several factors, including geography, socioeconomic status, culture, gender, race, ethnicity, and age.

WLP guests who have experienced trauma can find healing, confidence, and empowerment through wellness programming. Deliberate program design will incorporate nutrition, medical care, physical movement, therapeutic expression, life skills, and peer support. WLP will build and strengthen partnerships with organizations with existing wellness programs, individual volunteers, and corporations with wellness expertise in areas that include mindfulness, self-esteem, emotional regulation, conflict resolution, smoking cessation, yoga, reiki, recovery programs, weight loss, and menopause. This programming will help develop self-care routines and, by offering these services within the WLP community, a guest's sense of belonging increases. Wellness programming is a catalyst to self-sufficiency.

## Healthy Meals

*Refine and expand the current meals program.*

According to Greater Boston Food Bank, 1.6 million residents of Massachusetts are food insecure. Further research conducted by Feeding America documents that Black and Hispanic individuals are disproportionately impacted and are more likely to be food insecure by 2.4 times and almost 2 times, respectively. Adults who eat a healthy diet live longer and have a lower risk of obesity, heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, cancer, and other physical and mental health problems. Food insecurity makes it extremely difficult to prevent and manage chronic disease. A healthy diet is the cornerstone of effective disease prevention and symptom management.

At WLP, we believe that food is medicine. We utilize healthy dietary patterns and a rich diversity of whole foods, working with our guests to ensure they have access to one of the key social determinants of health. Ninety-one percent of women who come to WLP for hunger relief and services report that they are totally reliant on food programs to meet all their nutritional needs. WLP will introduce medically tailored meals, expand access and meals support for women, and collaborate with local nutrition programs to promote health benefits and nutritional awareness.



## Hospitals

*Build long-term collaborative relationships with hospitals to develop complementary supportive programming for women struggling with hunger, homelessness, and poverty.*

Access to healthcare is imperative for women who rely on Women's Lunch Place. The mortality rate for the unsheltered population is 10 times higher than the general population and 3 times higher than those who access shelters, according to a 10-year study published in 2018 in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

WLP enjoys a robust partnership with Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program, which offers our guests onsite access to a range of primary care services for acute, chronic, and infectious diseases and early detection of diseases common in high-risk women's populations.

Women served at WLP who would particularly benefit from additional supportive healthcare programming and managed discharge processes in our safe, gender-specific setting are older women with severe mental illness, transgender women, and younger women with intersecting active drug use and dependence on survival sex.

WLP will build and strengthen partnerships with hospitals and community health centers that offer mental and behavioral health support, as well as transgender, elder, and recovery services.



# Philanthropic Support

WLP is grateful to the committed donors who financially support Women's Lunch Place. According to the Women's Philanthropy Institute, only 1.6% of all U.S. charitable giving is directed to women's and girls' causes. Your investment will enable us to meet the acute and growing needs of women experiencing hunger, homelessness, and poverty.

The Center for Disaster Philanthropy's research predicts that nearly four in ten nonprofits could close due to COVID-related revenue shortages over the next three years. Women's Lunch Place's 39-year history is a testament to our organizational ability to attract and retain philanthropic individuals and organizations who value our evidence-based programming and demonstrated impact and make a commitment to support the marginalized women who utilize our critical services.

As WLP plans for the next five years, we anticipate a prolonged pathway to recovery for our guests. Women will be challenged to overcome complex barriers to achieve food security, stable housing, and improved emotional and physical health. We will continue to innovate in response to these issues.

Throughout our history of change, growth, and impact, the priority of Women's Lunch Place has never shifted. We individualize services to adapt to each guest's unique needs. We acknowledge her dignity and treat her with respect.



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