FY2021 Year-End Report

women’s lunch place
Organizational Overview

The mission and programs of Women’s Lunch Place have expanded greatly since our inception in 1982. Our work reflects a long tradition of service to Boston’s most disadvantaged population—women experiencing hunger, homelessness, and poverty. All who identify as women are welcomed regardless of race, immigration status, gender identity, religious affiliation, or criminal background.

Our talented staff members approach these isolated, fragile women with compassion and dignity. Individualized, deliberate stabilization processes allow each woman to orchestrate her own journey to health and well-being. WLP’s innovation, expertise, and collaborative efforts have enabled us to alleviate hunger, prevent homelessness, increase income, and secure greater access to health care in the Greater Boston community.
Circumstances beyond our control can often influence our ability to survive and thrive. Neighborhood, income, education, discrimination, and environment all affect disease risk and lifelong health. Factors like these, which are known as Social Determinants of Health, have a significant impact on well-being and lifespan.

We know that minority communities have been disproportionately affected by a lack of access to healthy nutrition, affordable housing, quality health care and education, and living-wage jobs. This reality is underscored by the health crisis over the past year. WLP continues to monitor extensive research done by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and others regarding the Social Determinants of Health, which defines and explains these disparities. Leadership and staff leverage this research to inform our model of care and drive impact accordingly.

For example, we understand that one in five Americans have behavioral health concerns. Additional research informs us that this ratio is significantly higher for WLP guests due to their history of trauma, isolation, anxiety, depression, and substance use disorders.

Equipped with this knowledge, our teams seize every opportunity to improve our guests’ health through individual services, referrals, and an onsite, dual-certified health care center.

Black and Hispanic individuals are more likely to be food insecure by 2.4 times and almost 2 times, respectively.

- Feeding America
In March 2020, four months before the fiscal year began, our community was hit with an immense new set of challenges. Isolation, hunger, housing insecurity, and day-to-day stress all increased significantly among the women we serve.

In response, WLP completely shifted our service model and continued to provide highly-specialized services throughout the pandemic.

Our kitchen pivoted to a take-out and delivery model, serving thousands of healthy meals each week. Additionally, we scaled up our Healthy Meals program to support an auxiliary overflow shelter which was created in response to the COVID epidemic.

Throughout the crisis, our Direct Care team layered on PPE and scheduled wash and fold laundry services—keeping a vital aspect of our care, and our guests’ dignity, available.

When guests were losing connections to their community and access to remote health care options, our Advocacy team secured and distributed technology (e.g., iPads, laptops, smartphones) to ensure they could get the resources they needed and stay connected remotely.

These examples illustrate the proactivity, creativity, and diligence of WLP staff in a time of urgent need. Throughout the challenges, we were able to build relationships, resolve critical requests, and continue improving the health and nutrition of vulnerable women.
In January 2021, we conducted a survey to determine our guests’ urgent needs in critical areas, including homelessness and housing insecurity, hunger, poverty, physical and behavioral healthcare, and isolation. The following data points describe the harsh reality of our guests’ daily existence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>relies on WLP or other food programs for nutrition</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unemployed</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>struggled with fair to poor mental health</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>struggled with fair to poor physical health</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experienced critical bills arrears (e.g., utilities and prescriptions)</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experienced decline in mental health related to COVID</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experienced rental arrears</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>food security was negatively impacted due to COVID</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>underwent housing instability due to COVID</td>
<td>22%</td>
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</table>
The WLP Kitchen solves a very basic need for our guests, hunger, by providing two nutritious meals each day. With that urgent issue addressed, the women we serve have more physical and emotional strength to address the long-term problems in front of them.

- **100,201** meals served in FY21
- **1,200** meals weekly prepared and delivered to individuals living at an overflow shelter created in response to COVID

Nurses and doctors from our partners at Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program (BHCHP) offer our guests free on-site health care services for primary care, urgent and chronic health conditions, Monday through Friday. A psychiatrist and psychologist offer counseling, and community health centers and agencies present informational workshops on relevant topics.
Direct Care

The Direct Care program responds to guests’ urgent needs in a safe and comfortable environment. The connections created during these interactions build a trusting relationship and provide a catalyst for our Advocates to address more complex issues.

During the pandemic, Direct Care staff began greeting and serving guests at the curbside six days a week, providing toiletries, books, PPE, and more. Over 8,000 protective items were distributed to guests in the form of hand sanitizer, masks, antibacterial soap, gloves, and other items. In addition, we hosted an emergency clothing drive to make sure that we had enough winter coats for guests in need. Laundry and shower services, which are crucial for guests’ personal dignity, as well as for job and housing interviews, were also operated by Direct Care staff.

Throughout the year, Direct Care staff members sort, secure, and deliver mail to guests who use 67 Newbury Street as a primary address. This is a critical support for women who are homeless and for those who feel unsafe receiving personal mail at their street address. A reliable mailing address is required to apply for a job, receive benefits, and maintain contact with fragile networks.

Additionally, as a part of WLP’s Wellness program, our team packaged and distributed therapeutic art kits and other inspiring projects to our artistically inclined guests.
Advocacy

Historically, on-site guests have met with Advocates, who provide care management services that begin to address the root causes of chronic homelessness—such as helping a client get her finances in order or making referrals for medical, psychological, and addiction services. During COVID, we successfully delivered these services through our Outreach Advocacy Initiative, which seeks to engage women who cannot access us at our shelter.

For example, Advocates will help their clients:

- Obtain skills to create and manage a budget
- Navigate the bureaucracies that surround government benefits
- Develop safety plans with Intimate Partner Violence survivors

622 Guests 4,616 Appointments 6,763 Issues
We also provide a range of **supportive housing stabilization services**.

Advocates provide emergency financial assistance to women who are:
- At serious risk of eviction
- Living in unsafe or substandard housing
- Need first and last month to secure a place to call home

At WLP, trained Advocates provide the expert assistance necessary to successfully apply for and ultimately secure low-income and subsidized housing in the Greater Boston area, including Roxbury, Dorchester, Mattapan, Chinatown, Chelsea, Cambridge, and Quincy.

We helped **217 women**—many of whom were homeless—**secure housing or preserve their tenancy**.

Our team worked in concert with women whose housing was in jeopardy to identify the factors that led to their eviction crisis and made individualized plans to address and eliminate those barriers going forward.

Our agency, which does not have its own housing stock, **housed 57 homeless women** in an incredibly difficult environment last year.
WLP is grateful to our committed donors who financially support Women’s Lunch Place. Your gifts guarantee our ability to provide meals and lifesaving services to the vulnerable women who rely on us for stability and solutions.

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. Given WLP’s evidence-based programming, our specific measures of success, and continued philanthropy from our community, WLP expects to continue to meet the acute and growing needs of women experiencing homelessness and poverty for many years to come.

Women’s Lunch Place’s 39-year history is a testament to our organizational ability to attract and retain valued investors. Our operating budget is supported by corporations, foundations, and individual donors that have a history of giving. Additionally, we have begun a major gifts campaign that will ensure WLP’s continued success in reaching our fundraising goals.

Throughout our history of change, growth, and impact, the main priority of Women’s Lunch Place has never shifted. We continue to meet each guest where she is and treat her with dignity and respect.
As WLP plans for the next five years, we anticipate a prolonged pathway to recovery for our guests. It will not be easy for them to become food secure, achieve stable housing, and improve their emotional and physical health. We are prepared to stand with our guests and neighbors as we help all women who turn to us move toward greater stability.
Contacts:

Jennifer Hanlon Wigon, Executive Director
Telephone: (617) 449-7186
Jennifer@womenlunchplace.org

Nancy Armstrong, Director of Operations
Telephone: (617) 449-7189
Nancy@womenslunchplace.org

Paula White, Chief Development Officer
Telephone: (617) 449-7190
Paula@womenslunchplace.org