Wellspring House, Inc.

Strategic Plan

2019-2022
An Introduction to Wellspring

Founded in 1981, Wellspring House is a longstanding anchor organization on Cape Ann created to help families live more secure lives through basic needs assistance.

Wellspring seeks to mend major societal gaps that prevent families from leading stable lives. We help families build their resource base for secure and reliable housing while increasing their earning potential.

Wellspring has a three-pronged approach to helping families move up and out of poverty:

**Homelessness Prevention and Intervention:** We provide comprehensive support and guidance to parents and their children to recover from the trauma of homelessness, put their lives back on track, and create long term social and financial supports to prevent families’ housing instability in the future. Further, Wellspring’s Family Shelter was one of the first organizations in the state of Massachusetts to make up the (now) statewide Emergency Assistance shelter system.

**Education, Job Training and Career Advising for Better Jobs:** Wellspring offers a "continuum of education" approach that helps our participants move toward more secure lives - improving their skills, their confidence, and their future job prospects. From GED and ESOL classes, to college preparation courses, to an innovative job training and placement collaboration at a major medical center, to individualized career counseling and planning - Wellspring’s approach enables its participants to move their lives forward through employment that leads to living wages.

**Building Trusting and Meaningful Relationships:** In today’s fragmented society, many families lack a supportive community of family, friends and neighbors. Wellspring helps fill this gap by creating a “community of mutual support”. From this foundation, program participants often make far greater progress than they thought was possible.

Wellspring is known for its collaborations with numerous local organizations and educational institutions both locally on Cape Ann and throughout the North Shore of Massachusetts. Each one of our major program areas hinges on key partnerships with higher education institutions, employers, peer non-profit organizations, municipal and state government, and/or local housing authorities. This ensures that our program participants have access to a wider network of assistance than Wellspring would be able to provide alone. Our work is funded with support from family foundations, private foundations, corporations, a network of nearly 2,000 individual donors and contracts with non-profit partners and the state
of Massachusetts. In all cases, Wellspring’s financial base relies on the foundation of strong relationships, some of which have developed over many years and even decades.

The Strategic Planning Process

Wellspring House has had tremendous success building methods and developing expertise to help local families and adults move up and out of poverty. The purpose of this strategic plan is to capitalize on our success and focus Wellspring to apply our strengths towards the areas of greatest community need. It is a guide to our future impact.

The planning process took place between February and April, 2019, with the participation of 150 people in the following activities:

- Facilitated focus groups with other agencies serving Cape Ann, staff and the Board of Directors
- Surveys of participants, staff, volunteers and the Board of Directors
- Interviews of selected stakeholders

After the data were gathered, a strategic planning committee met to consider the data and develop the goals and objectives for the strategic plan. Members of the committee were:

**Board Members (former and current)**
- **Julie Bishop, Chair**
- **Rosemary Costello**
- **Faith Emerson**
- **Caroline Hovey**
- **Polly Knowles**
- **Kim McGovern**

**Staff Members**
- **Camilla Blackman, Dir. of Job Training Initiatives**
- **Melissa Buchanan, Coordinator, Adult Learning Center (ESOL)**
- **Melissa Dimond, Executive Director**
- **Katie O’Leary, Homelessness Prevention Case Manager**
- **Laura Pedone, Dir. of Career Pathways**
- **Lisa Robinson, Dir. of Development**

Where Wellspring Is Today

Using the information gathered, the committee developed a strategic analysis which provided a clear picture of Wellspring and the people and communities it serves. The highlights of that analysis are shared below.
The Context

The last several years have brought enormous changes for Wellspring as well as in the housing market and the communities of Gloucester, Cape Ann and the North Shore.

Wellspring

Wellspring is rapidly increasing the number of people it serves in the arenas of homelessness prevention, education and career advising. In fiscal year 2018, Wellspring provided assistance to more than 1,860 parents, adults, young adults, and children.

In 2002, Wellspring started the Wellspring Community Education MediClerk training program in partnership with Salem Hospital. In 2017, this program received national accreditation. Graduates of MediClerk (374 to date) receive 19 credits at North Shore Community College which is one-third of an Associate’s Degree. Graduates enter career ladder positions in hospitals, medical practices, and other comparable settings. Eighty-five percent of graduates secure employment within 6 months of completing the program, making MediClerk one of the highest performing job training programs in the state of Massachusetts.

In 2015, Wellspring created the Wellspring Education Resource Collaborative, an innovative model of one-to-one and group career and educational advising for adults that also aims to create a network of education and employment agencies in Gloucester and nearby communities. In 2016, Wellspring began partnering with Gloucester High School’s Guidance Team to provide customized support for high school seniors who lack plans for education or employment upon graduation.

Wellspring offers a slate of Adult Education courses across a continuum that leads to post-secondary education: starting with ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) and progressing to academic study for college preparation and entry. All Wellspring courses now qualify for credits at North Shore Community College.

While Wellspring still provides emergency shelter and has ever since its founding in 1981, its primary focus shifted in 2017 to preventing homelessness. Wellspring’s reach for homelessness prevention, education, job training, and career advising extends beyond Gloucester to all of the North Shore.

Fifteen percent of staff are Wellspring program graduates themselves. We see this as a critical sign of success.
The Housing Market

Housing costs have risen dramatically creating a shortage of housing for a wide demographic of low-to-moderate-income households. The biggest stress is on low wage earners who face the most serious housing instability and have the most pressure for higher wages. It is no longer enough to have a job, one must earn enough to afford housing over the long haul.

Low income families in Massachusetts (lower than $30,000 for a family of four) represent 32% of the rental market (313,053 families). These families typically spend more than 50% of their income on rent. Severely cost burdened, low income families are more likely than other renters to sacrifice other necessities such as healthy food and health care to pay rent and more likely to experience unstable housing.

In Massachusetts, the number of homeless families has more than doubled in nine years and families now make up over 67% of the total homeless population in the state.

At any given time, there are between 350 and 400 known homeless families on the North Shore utilizing shelter and related services through the Massachusetts Emergency Assistance system.

Housing costs in Massachusetts are increasing at a faster rate than in any other state in the nation.

The Community

The poverty level for a family of four is $25,750. Public assistance such as SNAP and reduced cost school lunches cut off at 150 – 200% of poverty. A North Shore family of three (single mother with two children) needs an annual income of $70,231 to live without government assistance. That annual income requires a single working parent to earn $33.76 per hour, nearly triple the current adult minimum wage of $12 per hour.

The cost of living on the North Shore is approximately $75,000 for a family of four. 8.5% of the population of Gloucester is below the poverty line while 40.5% live below the cost of living. 15.3% of the population of Salem live below the poverty line while 46% live below the cost of living. 18.2% of the population of Lynn lives below the poverty line while 57.8% live below the cost of living.

35% of the students in Gloucester Public Schools are economically disadvantaged. Over the past five years, the number of newly arriving immigrant and refugee families in Gloucester has increased substantially. Gloucester Public Schools experienced a 64% increase
in the number of students who speak a primary language other than English. Nearly 300 students in the district (10%) have a first language other than English. This trend brings with it a new set of needs in the community.

Adults who fail to graduate from high school and/or attend college earn 40% less and experience unemployment at higher rates than educated peers.

Single mothers with college degrees not only earn significantly higher wages over their lifetimes, their children show improved vocabulary, reading and math scores and increased likelihood of college enrollment.

Despite graduation rates of 91% (compared to 88% statewide), 33% of Gloucester High School graduates do not pursue post-secondary education (compared to 24% statewide.) 49% of economically disadvantaged GHS graduates do not attend post-secondary education (compared to 34% statewide).

State of the Organization

The strategic planning committee looked at the strengths, areas for growth and improvement, challenges and opportunities for Wellspring at this moment at time.

**Strengths include**
High quality, effective programming
Seen as a hub for resource information in the community
Collaborations and partnerships
Strong history and reputation
High touch service model
Wrap around programs and services
All age/lifelong learning
Long term perspective with program participants
Strong staff both paid and volunteer
Ability to change with the times

**Challenges include**
Understaffed for level of programming
Inadequate/inappropriate facilities
Non central location
Managing the complexity of program participants’ needs
Managing cultural diversity
Community does not know who we are and what we are doing today (“Not just a shelter any more”)
Communication issues
Barriers to participation in programming such as transportation, child care, mental health issues
Technology inadequate or not up to date
Ever increasing need
Program participants face multi-layered problems/struggles eg housing, transportation, food

Opportunities include
Growing need for ESOL programming
High demand for vocational training
Bringing agencies together to address specific populations or issues
Leverage successful programming
Fast growing newly arrived immigrant and refugee population

Envisioning the Future & Setting Direction

Vision: Wellspring is guided by the vision of a just society where every member of our community thrives. We are an innovative and welcoming learning environment where people push beyond the limits of their lives to realize success and fulfillment.

Mission: Wellspring inspires families and adults on the North Shore to achieve employment and financial security through stable housing, education, job training and career readiness.

Wellspring today is poised to expand its leadership role in
- developing, implementing and distributing innovative and effective programming
- convening coalitions to focus on particular populations and issues
- advocating for effective homelessness prevention systems

Goals & Objectives

The goals below were adopted to directly serve Wellspring's mission. The first goal directly addresses career preparation and professional development to ensure viable employment. The second goal directly addresses increasing housing stability. The third goal expands Wellspring's role as an advocate for housing stability. The final two goals address Wellspring itself and its role in the community. Ensuring the community is aware of Wellspring and its work is key both to developing strategic partnerships and to developing support for
Wellspring. The final goal is to invest in the organization itself. Investing in and supporting our people is the path to achieving Wellspring’s mission.

**Goal 1: Expand and deepen Wellspring’s impact creating opportunities through education, career preparation and professional development to ensure viable employment.**

Objective 1.1 Establish Wellspring as the convenor for Cape Ann post-secondary education attainment and employment readiness including degrees, certifications and the trades

- Expand the reach and presence of the Wellspring Education Resource Collaborative in the larger North Shore area
- Demonstrate the effectiveness of the Wellspring Education Resource Collaborative career counseling and coaching model
- Bring courses from a major higher education partner to Gloucester

Objective 1.2 Convene a coalition working in close partnership welcoming and helping immigrants and refugees to navigate the Cape Ann community

Objective 1.3 Expand the Wellspring Community Education MediClerk Training Program

- Increase the number of students served by at least 100% either by increasing the number of students in the existing program or by offering the program at night and on weekends
- Open the program in another community and/or with another health care partner

Objective 1.4 Develop a consultancy to replicate the Wellspring Community Education MediClerk Training Program model beyond the North Shore

Objective 1.5 Develop strategic partnerships with mid-to-large size employers on Cape Ann and adjacent towns to provide Adult Education courses for employee advancement for example ESOL, math, computers, and business communication

Objective 1.6 Expand direct linkages with institutions of higher education on the North Shore so Wellspring students will matriculate seamlessly

Objective 1.7 Establish strategic partnerships to reduce the major barriers that prevent financially disadvantaged community members from attending and completing Wellspring programs for example child care, transportation, or successful mental health supports
**Goal 2: Increase housing stability on the North Shore**

Objective 2.1 Increase the number of families in Wellspring’s homelessness prevention program to more than 100 families per year

Objective 2.2 Continue to build and improve systems for Cape Ann families to connect with state sponsored Emergency Assistance (EA) homelessness prevention and family shelter services

Objective 2.3 Expand Wellspring’s homelessness prevention model within the organization so that any participant in Wellspring’s programs will be eligible for case management and access to one-time, strategic homelessness prevention funds

**Goal 3: Deepen Wellspring’s role and effectiveness in advocating for housing stability on the North Shore**

Objective 3.1 Increase Wellspring’s role and presence as an advocate for homelessness prevention and housing stability on policy issues at all levels of government

Objective 3.2 Participate in the larger discourse as a thought leader, advocate and spokesperson for best practices

**Goal 4: Build awareness of Wellspring and its work in the community**

Objective 4.1 Create a culture and program of ambassadorship such that everyone in the Wellspring community, program participants, staff, volunteers and board members, effectively shares the story of Wellspring in the community

Objective 4.2 Increase awareness so community leaders and local residents understand the issues and complexity of financial insecurity, financial opportunity and homelessness, the level of need in the region, Wellspring’s work, and the community’s role in addressing these issues

**Goal 5: Strengthen Wellspring’s organizational systems and infrastructure to support current operations and future growth.**

Objective 5.1 Develop a desirable and attractive work environment including appropriate compensation and opportunities for career advancement

Objective 5.2 Develop appropriate levels of staffing, both paid and volunteer
Objective 5.3 Develop a plan to improve long-term financial stability; the plan to consider large scale funding, multi-year funding sources, opportunities for earned revenue and Increasing the endowment

Objective 5.4 Expand professional development for staff and volunteers for example training for working with individuals who have experienced trauma

Objective 5.5 Develop a long term plan for Wellspring's physical facilities and locations

Objective 5.6 Develop the Board of Directors to provide vision, leadership and governance; including clarifying roles and responsibilities, instituting a program of strategic board recruitment and orientation, training and moving towards a best practices model of board performance

Objective 5.7 Develop policies and procedures appropriate for the size and complexity of the organization

With these goals and objectives, Wellspring is moving boldly to achieve its mission.