

newsletter

Executive Director's Greeting



Dear Friends,

Happy New Year! The Women's Lunch Place has been very busy these last few months with exciting opportunities and difficult challenges. With the Spaghetti Dinner the most successful in its 23 year history, we exceeded our projected fundraising goal raising more than \$230,000. The response to our Holiday Giving Program was the best ever thanks to so many who made support of the WLP a priority this holiday season.

We consider ourselves fortunate to work with so many donors, volunteers, and staff who are dedicated to treating women with dignity and respect. I believe that there is balance in the Universe so even as we celebrate so many successes, we've been busy trimming our budget to reflect the reality of donor giving in this climate. We recognize that the ripple effects of this economy are spread wide and that donors and volunteers

at every level of the organization are evaluating how best to leverage limited support to ensure that your beloved WLP remains a viable resource for poor and homeless women. We thank you for your support and feel your pain too.

I have invested a lot of time over the last few months thinking, writing, and speaking about gratitude. And, I am persuaded that in my own life, I have enough. I came to this conclusion after seeing one of our guests at a rehabilitation center. As I prepared to leave, I asked her if she needed anything and her response has helped shape the way I look at my life. She said, "Sharon, I don't need a thing, I have enough."

The economic conditions facing this country have already rattled the foundations of our beloved shelter. Compared to 2007 our total number of lunches served has increased by 24% during the first six months of 2008. This combined with a 17% increase in the cost of food has caused us great concern. Everyday the Women's Lunch Place accepts every woman who walks into our Shelter with open arms and a nutritious meal, please help us continue our good work through these tough times. It is my hope that you take this opportunity to think about all the women we serve at the Shelter and help us ensure that they have enough too.

*Wishing you the best,
Sharon Reilly*

Dramatic Increase in the number of lunches served at the WLP in the last 6 Months

The Women's Lunch Place has seen a 24% increase in services over just the last 6 months. The higher numbers, combined with the rising food costs, and a one-third reduction in food received from The Greater Boston Food Bank has had a deep impact on our expenditures and capacity.

For example:

- The Women's Lunch Place served 200 more breakfasts and 435 more lunches in May of 2008 when compared to May of 2007.
- The Women's Lunch Place served an average of 103 lunches per day in December of 2007 and in May of 2008 served an average of 128 per day.

The reason for this large jump in meals being served is directly related to the spike in Boston's hunger rates. Hunger rates skyrocketed from 8% to 18% over the last three years. And as a result, the 2006-2007 City of Boston's Annual Homeless Census identified 1,669 homeless women, up from 1,065 counted in 1996-1997.

As expected, homeless women and women living below the poverty line do not come close to having the income necessary to meet their most basic needs. If a woman is lucky enough to receive any form of public assistance, her monthly income ranges between \$150-600 per month. Women who do work, and who still are below the poverty line, are lucky if they earn \$1000 a month. Incomes like these leave much to be desired and many women can not house, clothes and feed themselves with what they are earning.

With your help and the assistance of our generous supporters, The Women's Lunch Place is dedicated to providing breakfast and lunch to Boston's poor and homeless women while maintaining a safe and nurturing environment.

New Board Members

The Women's Lunch place is pleased and proud to announce the new President of the Board of Directors, Sarah Monaco and new board members!

New President of the Board of Directors

Sarah Monaco is a freelance broadcast producer. She has worked in advertising for the last 20 years and was Vice President, Senior Producer at Mullen Advertising, where she worked for 12 years. She became involved with The Women's Lunch Place 16 years ago as a volunteer on Saturdays and has been on the Board of Directors for 8 years. We welcome Sarah into this new role and know she will lead the board with the same kind of indomitable professionalism she has brought throughout her career. Welcome Sarah!

New members of the Board of Directors

Hannah Grove is Executive Vice President of State Street Corporation and head of Global Marketing. **Debra Maguire** is the Office Administrator for the Boston office of the law firm of Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi, LLP. She has worked with her firm's charitable foundation to organize and

run a golf event that has raised money for the Special Olympics of Massachusetts. **Derri Shtasel** is a clinical psychiatrist at Cambridge Health Alliance, with a longstanding passion for homeless causes. She currently serves as a volunteer psychiatrist for Health-care for the Homeless in Somerville.

Karen Spiller is a certified diversity/multiculturalism specialist with incredible experience in organizational development, needs assessments, and strategic planning. She works for Blue Cross and Blue Shield's Jump-up & Go! Program. A program designed to address the epidemic of childhood obesity. **Shelley Stark** is a public health professional who has 20 years of experience in managing projects to educate communities, researchers, policymakers, clinical providers and public health practitioners in the fields of social service delivery, maternal and child health, welfare policy, and substance abuse prevention. She is the Senior Project Director of the Center for Health Policy and Research at UMASS Medical School.

Laura Tomasetti is a 20 year veteran



Sarah Monaco (President of the Board) and Sharon Reilly (Executive Director)

of the public relations field and is the founder and managing director of 360 Public Relations LLC in Boston.

Their distinctive abilities and skill sets will be greatly appreciated and welcomed. The WLP is looking forward to working with new and current board members to expand our fundraising efforts and increase the overall impact of the service we provide to poor and homeless women in our community.

Make a Gift to the Women's Lunch Place Today!

For over 25 years, the Women's Lunch Place has made a difference in the lives of Boston's poor and homeless women. We are open six days a week, year-round, to offer food, friendship, and a full spectrum of advocacy and support services to each of our guests. But we don't do it alone. We need your help. By making a gift to the Women's Lunch Place today, you too can make a difference in these women's lives.

For more information or to make a gift, please visit our website at www.womenslunchplace.org or calling **617-267-1722**.



A Recipe for Thanks



Volunteers

The WLP and Federal Home Loan Bank Honor Our Amazing Volunteers!

On April 17, 2008, over 70 WLP volunteers joined together in celebration to honor the service and dedication of all our amazing volunteers.

This year's Annual Volunteer Appreciation Event entertained volunteers with good company, music, and delicious food brought to you by celebrity chefs Glenn Quirion of Sweet Tooth Boston, Kenshi Imura of Café Sushi in Cambridge, Morrissa Iocco co-founder of Bricco, Mare and Umbria; and Frank Gallagher.

The evening highlights included a special party favor crafted by

WLP staff and volunteers: a cookbook full of delicious recipes found its way into the hearts and homes of our beloved volunteers.

This wonderful event was made possible by our friends at Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston with a joint contribution of \$7,500 for our volunteer event and our 23rd Annual Spaghetti Dinner.

The WLP extends a special thank you to the countless volunteers and supporters who make our work possible.

The gift of reading

*by: Ann Moritz,
from an email she sent to Milton residents who supported this project*

It was barely 7:30 in the morning when I pulled up to the Women's Lunch Place on Newbury Street. Boxes of your books stretched from the passenger front seat to the end of my rear hatch door. Within five minutes, I had four energetic guests helping me unload over 400 books.

"Oh my, I love Elizabeth Gilbert," one imposing six-foot-plus guest said after she insisted on carrying the heaviest load. Soon, a series of lunch tables filled with boxes of your generosity.

Other women came along to move books into a room called the Library. Additional women followed behind them to help. Weary women on the library sofas opened their eyes to action they hadn't anticipated.

Then on the day before Thanksgiving, with a now-empty car outside, I wandered back through this lunch room beneath the Church of the Covenant. The tables were only beginning to fill. Sleepy guests trickled in off the street. I will never forget the sight of nearly a dozen women in chairs around the room -- every single one with their nose buried in a book they had chosen.

Your thoughtfulness this holiday has been something quite special. I hope this snapshot will linger in your memory as it has in mine. Thank you so very much.

The WLP's 23rd Annual Spaghetti Dinner!



Joseph Bator and his wife Julia Kim and Joseph Bator's Father

This year's Spaghetti Dinner was a tremendous success. It all began at 67 Newbury Street where friends, staff, and volunteers joined together in celebration of our shared mission: to treat every woman with dignity and respect. With beautiful guest art on display, the evening was already buzzing with camaraderie and good cheer.

The evening then shifted its attention to the Taj Boston Hotel; the food, program, and auction flowed seamlessly together. Linda Burston, WLP Support Coordinator, inspired us with her eloquent portrayal of her triumphs

and tribulations and our live auction rallied attendees together for a good cause.

The culmination of everyone's efforts and generosity helped the WLP raise over \$230,000. In these tough economic times, the 23rd Annual Spaghetti Dinner is a beacon of hope that philanthropy will survive through the generous supporters who are the glue to our

organization.

Thank you to everyone who made the WLP's 23rd Annual Spaghetti Dinner a night to remember!



Sarah Monaco, Mayor Thomas M. Menino, and Sharon Reilly



Governor Deval Patrick and guest Crystal presenting a thank you card

Celtics Beat LA!

What happens when two Governors make a friendly wager on the hottest basketball team around? The WLP celebrates California style with 17 lbs. of California-grown oranges, cheeses, pistachio nuts, raisins and freshly cut flowers courtesy of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger – ah, victory never tasted so good.

With the stakes set high, Governor Patrick and Governor Schwarzenegger agreed to honor a charity of either's choosing with 17 lbs. of goodies for whoever's team was victorious in the 2008 NBA Finals. Thanks to this friendly wager, and the Celtics, the WLP celebrated a historic win for Boston sports and homelessness.

On celebration day, Governor Patrick stopped by 67 Newbury Street where he took his time greeting, hugging, and speaking with each guest individually. Governor Patrick also took time to admire our display of fresh California foods, take a tour of the kitchen area, and speak with WLP Executive Director Sharon Reilly.

"When you participated in the friendly wager with Governor Schwarzenegger, you made a fast break for the game of basketball," said Sharon Reilly. "When you chose the Women's Lunch Place, you made a slam dunk for poor and homeless women. Not only can we beat LA, we can also beat chronic homelessness," said Reilly.

Governor Patrick thanked Reilly and the staff at the WLP for all of their hard work and addressed the guests in his speech.

"I don't have all the answers," said Governor Patrick, "but we are working very hard to find the answers...I want you to know that I see you."

Later that day, the food from Governor Schwarzenegger was used to prepare the day's special lunch, "California Love Salad."



AHCAP Members at a WLP Ice Cream Social

Tuesday, June 17, 2008 the AHCAP paid a special visit to the Women's Lunch Place in hopes of beating summer heat with our very first Ice Cream Social.

The Association of Healthcare Administrative Professionals (AHCAP) Share Sweet Treats With the WLP

"The smiles were abundant and contagious and I'm unsure who really had more fun – us or them. More importantly, our hope is that all of the wonderful women we interacted with that day know how profoundly they touched our hearts. They will always have our deepest respect and admiration for the courage and determination they demonstrate every day," said Mindy Levine, AHCAP liaison.

The AHCAP, known for being the largest nonprofit healthcare organization to focus on administrative professionals, executive assistants and other

professionals reporting to healthcare management, has selected The WLP as the recipient charity for this year's national conference which took place June 18-20. Funds from this event totaled over \$2,200.00. In addition to these proceeds this year's conference focused on Servant Leadership and will sponsor the WLP with chapter donations throughout the year.

A special thank you to Mindy Levine and the folks at AHCAP for their continued support and commitment to serving the community.

An Act of Kindness



Katrina

Katrina's Community Service Project Goes Above and Beyond

Katrina, a thirteen year old resident of Carlisle, Mass., has collected travel sized soaps and shampoos from friends and family since she was a little girl. Naturally, when it came time for her eighth grade community service project, Katrina wanted to share her collection with someone who needed it more.

After researching women's shelters on the Internet, Katrina stumbled across the WLP and decided to share her collection with a place she felt connected to. However, Katrina wanted to do more than just donate toiletries, she wanted to make an impact.

After e-mailing all of her friends and

family, Katrina was able to collect enough to fill two large duffel bags of personal care items and a large canvas bag with holiday and birthday items for WLP guests. Included in this generous donation, Katrina hand crafted glass bead earrings for the WLP's monthly birthday celebration.

Katrina and her mother personally delivered the donated items to the shelter on October 18, 2008. The guests, who were very excited to meet her, gave her a round of applause and presented her with a 'thank you' card. Katrina and her mother were given a tour of the shelter by Linda Burston, the WLP Support Coordinator.

"I was surprised that someone her age would think of doing this," said Burston. "Her donations have been very helpful."

Food for the body, Food for the Soul

Creative Expressions is reborn at the Women's Lunch Place

Since its inception in 2006, the Creative Expressions Program at the WLP has grown to serve more than 20 women weekly.

"Expressive therapy is an alternative method of exploring the intricacies of ones own, life through art," said Devon second year master's student at Leslie University.

Today Ryanne and Devon, master's students in Expressive Therapy at Leslie University, oversee the program four days a week. Since its modest beginnings in early 2006 the Creative Expressions program transformed itself from an impromptu program to a fully functional program complete with performance art, photography, fine art, knitting, cultural outings, and creative writing.

"If the food the WLP serves nourished our guests' bodies, we want Creative Expressions to nourish the souls of

our women. I want people to know that the WLP is more than a soup kitchen. Creative Expressions is a very substantial piece of a program with many different facets of expression that can enrich lives and help our women gain their dignity and respect," said Anne Bromer.

Anne and David Brome, long time WLP supporters and owners of Bromer Booksellers, have generously agreed to contribute \$25,000 annually over the next five years to the Creative Expressions Program. This generous commitment will underwrite more than half of the program's current annual operating cost of almost \$50,000.

Thanks to the Bromers and a wide and consistent pool of talented help, many guests thrive in the Creative Expression Program; some through the therapeutic healing that expressive therapy provides, some through the exploration of a new talent, and some through the discovery of courage.



Anne and David Bromer

In celebration of this year's Creative Expressions Program the Out of the Mood Gallery in Cambridge will hold a two week exhibition of WLP art in early May 2009. For more information and details, please check out our website next spring.

"I Have Friends Here."



Laura Diener and Aida

Guest, Laura Diener, speaks of her life, the WLP, and making it through the toughest of times

It was 8 years ago when Laura Diener walked through the front doors of the Women's Lunch Place, the victim of an abusive boyfriend.

"I came to the Women's Lunch Place because my daughter and I needed help and we became homeless," said the 53 year old quietly. "The staff rallied around us, fed us, and gave me the will to keep going and to start again," said Laura. Like so many others in distress, Laura became a permanent fixture in the safe community of the WLP.

Laura was born in the Motor City: Detroit, Michigan. She grew up grooving to good soul music and partying with her friends. It was her parents' divorce that brought her and her father to Massachusetts. Though she didn't have much contact with her mother, life was good. She enjoyed her friends and after graduating from high school Laura moved to Boston and began working as a Supply Clerk for Blue Cross Blue Shield.

By the young age of 23 Laura had her first child and shortly after her sec-

ond. As a single parent of two young children, Laura moved to the South End of Boston with her then boyfriend of 10 years. It was during this time when, according to Laura, "most of her trouble began." Luckily, Laura found a safe place in the WLP when she needed it most.

"I feel safe and comfortable here. If this place wasn't here, I would go to my church or something, but I am glad it's here. There is a wonderful support system here," said Laura.

For Laura, the next few years would prove the hardest of all. She became homeless again in November of 2006 when she fell into an emotional tailspin after the death of her beloved father. "I almost had a nervous breakdown. I had a nice place in Revere, but I couldn't handle it. I couldn't handle the weight of being responsible for an apartment," said Laura with sadness.

While living her life in shelters, Laura spent her nights at the Pine Street Inn where she enrolled in their Culinary Arts Program. After graduating from Pine Street's program, Laura found a job through a temp agency working part time as a server for the Boston

Convention Bureau. "Now I work for Bunker Hill Community College in the cafeteria and the kitchen. I make everything, burgers, fries, sandwiches. I love my job," beamed Laura.

When she is not there, she continues to be a regular in the dining hall of The WLP. Recently a member of The WLP advocacy team helped her to find a place to live. Now, she is a resident of the YMCA in Cambridge. "The Women's Lunch Place helped me again. This time to find a place to live, if it wasn't for the staff I would be living in the streets," said Laura.

As for the future, this 53 year has plans to get a year-round job where she can spend more time with her daughters. "The future looks good for me. I've made lots of friends here," said Laura with a smile as she engages in a conversation with another WLP regular. "Ida is my good friend, we sit together every day and talk.' The Women's Lunch Place gives me a place where I feel like it's home, like it's family. I'll always come to the WLP."



Laura Diener

A Visit From Royalty



King Kpoto-Zommie Hakpon, staff, volunteers, and guests of the WLP

King Kpoto-Zomme Hakpon III of Benin visits the WLP

Regal in stature, poised and proper, King Kpoto-Zomme Hakpon III of Benin Africa, graced the staff, guests, and volunteers of the WLP for a special visit this past April.

"I've seen a lot of Kings on television," said one guest, "but never have I seen one in person, so this is very special."

Clad in a full-length leopard print robe carrying a staff, King Hakpon's two-week long visit to Boston marked the first time that a King of the Republic of Benin has visited the United States.

However, King Hakpon's visit was not strictly for pleasure or visiting the WLP. The purpose of his visit was to apologize for the role that his ancestors played in facilitating slave trade. "I [also] came here so that the people of African descent can reconnect our lines and heritage, to reconstruct the homeland," said King Hakpon.

Fortunately King Hakpon had an opportunity to meet with Executive Director Sharon Reilly in a private reception, where Reilly told him more about the unique mission of the day-

time shelter we fondly refer to as the WLP.

"The women here are honored to have the King visit," said Reilly. "He gives a different level of importance to the poor and homeless here in Boston."

During his 40 minute visit at the WLP, King Hakpon, through a translator, spoke about the conditions of working women in his country, who spend long hours sewing, fishing and farming to make a living.

At the end of his visit at the WLP, Hakpon asked for some water. When he was given a bottle, he prayed for the souls of Africans who had been sold into slavery and poured a drop of water onto the floor in a solemn practice called "pouring liberations."

* King Hakpon's visit to Boston was coordinated by Wheelock College, UMass Boston, Hope For Africa, and the Haitian Multi-Purpose Center in Dorchester, where he had other speaking engagements.



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The Women's Lunch Place would like to send a special thank you to the wonderful sponsors that are making this year's Spaghetti Dinner possible!

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