



STRATEGIC PLAN

2022-2027



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The staff, Board, and leadership team at Women's Interval Home Sarnia-Lambton Inc. (WIHSL) are truly remarkable people. Their ability to respond with compassion and commitment to the unique needs of the people they serve hasn't wavered despite significant changes in leadership and an apparently endless pandemic which severely affected service delivery. Their commitment to systemic change, which is at the core of the issue of violence against women, remains steadfast.

Heartfelt gratitude is also extended to all the community partners who so willingly gave of their time and expertise to develop the following strategic plan. Their collective support and guidance is critical to the change WIHSL envisions.

The Women's Interval Home of Sarnia-Lambton is situated on the traditional territory of the Anishinabek, Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), and Ojibway/Chippewa peoples. We acknowledge the many longstanding treaty relationships between Indigenous Nations and Canada, including the Two Row Wampum Treaty (1613) and Treaty 29 (1827). We recognize that all levels of government in Canada have a responsibility to honour the Nation-to-Nation relationships these treaties represent, and that, individually, we all have a role to play in the process of truth and reconciliation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Kate Wiggins of Collateral Conversations was retained in July of 2021 by the Board of Directors of WIHSL to develop a strategic plan for the organization. A strategic planning advisory group was struck to oversee the plan and provide feedback on its various elements. Questionnaires were developed for each stakeholder group and administered by phone or Zoom meetings through October. Two full day retreats were held for the staff and the Board. The data derived from these interviews was shared and the vision, mission, and values of the organization subsequently renewed. Three goals were identified: 1) enhance services through evidence-based innovation and community partnerships; 2) enhance resources to serve people experiencing gender-based violence; 3) enhance Board value and contributions.

METHODOLOGY

A strategic advisory planning committee was struck with the executive director, two board members, two staff representatives, and two members from the leadership team. Additionally, the leadership team met on alternate weeks to review progress and provide feedback and input during the process.

We developed the following principles to guide the planning process:

- The people served are to be at the centre of the plan;
- All voices are to be heard;
- A feminist intersectional analysis is used to examine policies and procedures and their impact on those people served;
- The safety of free expression for all is to be secured;
- The thirteen core principles of the Canadian standard on Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace are to inform the examination of this difficult work;
- A plan that is usable (understood) and doable (able to be achieved) is to result.

Guided by questionnaires developed for each stakeholder, nineteen community-partner interviews (phone or Zoom) and three funder interviews with people from the Ministry of Children and Community and Social Services were conducted. All staff were interviewed individually or supplied information and feedback during two residential team meetings. The leadership team and board were interviewed individually. There was also a Zoom meeting with one long term executive director from each of the following: a merged sexual assault-and-shelter organization; an urban and rural shelter organization; and the provincial association The Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Homes (OAITH). All interviews were conducted by Kate Wiggins. Two retreats were also held, one for the staff and one for the Board of Directors.

Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated gender-based violence profoundly: we've seen an ongoing increase in femicides in 2020 and 2021, a 30% increase in domestic violence in Canada, and an exponential increase in helpline calls. While following guidelines from the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services and the Ministry of Health and Public Health, WIHSL redesigned shelter life, at times relocating those seeking service to hotels. Service delivery also adapted significantly in non-residential programs to keep clients and staff safe.

As this pandemic continues to evolve, it appears that we are not close to its end and that new protocols will continue to be implemented. Our panel of experts suggested that residents are vastly different from those of 50 years ago when the first shelter was built: women seeking shelter now carry more complicated histories, with many suffering from the effects of long-term abuse, PTSD, migration trauma, mental health issues, and substance use. Shelters are challenged to remain relevant while developing the financial capacity, staff acumen, and partnerships to respond to increasingly complex lives.

During the Harris government, many cutbacks to funding had negative consequences for women and children. As a result, women and children entering shelters suffered a significant increase in risk of revictimization as well as the exacerbated damaging effects of long-term gender-based violence. This pattern will continue. Although government has supplied generous funding during the pandemic, women continue to bear the brunt of the pandemic financially, emotionally, and physically. Inherent systemic issues have not significantly changed; organizations still operate in siloes and many

work off the sides of their desks trying to solve the exceptionally complicated effects of gender-based violence. Additionally, we see children “Zoomed out”, with many suffering from trauma, high anxiety, and severe mental health issues from seeing ongoing abuse coupled with the psychosocial effects of the pandemic.

Aging Infrastructure

WIHSL has been in the shelter business for 43 years. 23 years ago, a new 10,000 square-foot shelter was built to provide safe accommodation for 17 women and children. As shelter and its services have evolved, it has become increasingly clear that significant changes are needed to the existing physical space. During the consultation, many issues were identified by staff, leadership, and the Board about needed upgrades. The extensive list includes the following: security-camera upgrades; repairs to the eavestroughs; a new playground and garden; rug replacement with flooring; a basement refresh—including a sensory room for children and a workout room for the women; a 6-burner stove for the kitchen, as well as a general upgrade to the kitchen; a separate cooking space for the women; and locked storage in the dining room area with keypads.

Community Partners

Sarnia-Lambton is a unique community. With few exceptions, everyone contacted was more than happy to share their thoughts about the services of WIHSL and eager to partner moving forward. Most community partners had positive comments to make about WIHSL. It was interesting to note, however, how little understood is the array of programs provided by WIHSL: many could identify the shelter’s provision of physical safety but few were clear about community outreach programs and programs provided inside the shelter.

Additionally, there was confusion in the community about the nature of the relationship between the Sexual Assault Centre of Sarnia-Lambton and WIHSL. Many times during phone interviews the question, “Are they amalgamating or not?” arose. Broad-based clarity and communication about the indefinite pause on the amalgamation would probably dispel any community misinformation that may have occurred.

The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services was consulted during the strategic planning process; they supplied several insights for WIHSL, offering suggestions about stepping back and looking at the bigger picture, identifying gaps in the community, and assessing best practices. “Working in partnership with community, what aspirational goals are possible for folks served?” Ministry feedback indicated evaluation frameworks are key. “Are clients better off having received service?” They also addressed diversity: “Are the staff and Board representative of the Sarnia and Lambton County community? Is the shelter culturally friendly, sensitive, and welcoming?”

Ongoing Housing Crisis

One of the key issues in Sarnia and Lambton County is the current housing crisis. Lack of housing was identified as an issue by many of the community partners and the staff of WIHSL. In addition to the lack of affordable housing stock, it is difficult for women to get special priority status as regulated by Ministry policy unless they are physically abused which also requires proof. Many of the women who live in shelter are very hesitant to call police and there seems to be little understanding of how personally traumatizing emotional and psychological harm is to women and children. There is also a lack of available transitional housing. Given the consequences of the pandemic, increased isolation for women and the resulting significant increase in domestic violence, coupled with the housing crisis, both the Board and staff are wanting to explore transitional housing opportunities.

Services For Boys And Men

Femicide is on the rise, with sons killing their mothers, former partners killing their spouses and children, and older women being murdered just as BIPOC women and those in the transgender community face escalating, discriminatory violence and lethality.

In the shelter system, there has long been an adage: “If he wants to murder her, he will.” The most significant increase in lethality occurs post-separation. Fifty percent of children in shelter are male and many attend child-witness programs to help them heal from their trauma. Many young males who have been sexually, physically, or emotionally abused at home, school, and church don’t receive the support they need to process their experience because boys tend to be socialized not to communicate their experiences and waiting lists are prohibitive. *Traumatized* boys without help often become *traumatizing* men, while women are often held accountable for the behaviour of the men in their lives. Systems have been created that do not hold men accountable, never asking them to be better people. Men are freed in Bail Court; first offences are minimized through the court system; peace bonds and non-association orders are hard to obtain and harder to enforce.

While we have partner assault programs and early intervention programs for men, they often lack the gendered analysis or psychological support that can make a difference. There are those rare programs out there like Caring Dads, offered through Changing Ways, that help men identify the risks they pose to their families and offer strategies to facilitate reflection without causing additional harm. But if men could be more broadly supported to be better people, although there would always be a need for shelter, we might also be able to provide other housing options for women and children such as remaining in their own home with staff supports or more long-term transitional housing.

There are not only many amazing opportunities for partnerships in Sarnia but also real opportunities to work collectively to actually make significant changes in the community that will mitigate the trauma of gender-based violence for women, children, and men.

Vision, Mission, And Values

The Board and staff decided that a review of the vision, mission and values was needed. Through amazing collaboration, during one Board retreat and one staff retreat, the revised vision, mission, and values were developed.

Our Vision

A safe and supported community where all voices are heard, and everyone lives free of abuse.

Our Mission

We Provide:

- ❖ Emergency shelter and crisis services, outreach, and education to our diverse rural and urban communities
- ❖ Advocacy and support to individuals, families, children, and youth
- ❖ Community education and awareness to counteract abuse, promoting social change through inclusive feminist work
- ❖ Helping people to navigate more support services through active collaboration with our community partners

We Value:

- ❖ **Safety** - We are dedicated to ensuring the safety of our staff, volunteers, and services users.
- ❖ **Resilience** - We strive to be flexible, adaptable, and persevere through challenges in order to best serve the needs of women and children in our community.
- ❖ **Empowerment** - Our team of dedicated staff empower women and children to realize their full self-determined potential as they rebuild a life free from abuse.
- ❖ **Education** - At WIHSL, we value education as it is a driving force of preventing abuse and fostering a safe community for all.
- ❖ **Advocacy** - By working in collaboration with local partners, we strive to end the cycle of gender-based violence in our community.

STRATEGIC GOALS 2022-2027

Goal 1: Enhance Services Through Evidence-Based Innovation and Community Partnerships

PROGRAM EVALUATION AND DEVELOPMENT

- ❖ With clients as active participants, evaluate all internal and external programs at WIHSL using an intersectional feminist lens to determine efficacy, equity, cultural friendliness, and return on investment.
- ❖ Explore potential partnerships with other services based on the evaluation results for internal and external program offerings. In short, pilot and adjust programs based on client input.
- ❖ Explore partnerships outside the social service network that will enhance prevention work [e.g. sports teams, school Boards, police (including OPP), housing].

- ❖ Update resources for intake.
- ❖ Update policies and procedures to ensure an intersectional feminist analysis and anti-oppression, anti-racism lens.
- ❖ Work with community partners to meaningfully address the housing crisis in Sarnia.
- ❖ Conduct a feasibility study to determine community need, cost, and models related to transitional housing in other communities and what might be needed and would work in Sarnia.
- ❖ Have the Board decide if the organization has the ongoing ability to support a transitional housing project.

SERVICES TO BOYS AND MEN

- ❖ Develop a criteria for assessing the organizational willingness to explore providing services to boys and men.
- ❖ Conduct a needs assessment to see what prevention or tertiary programming exists in Sarnia and Lambton County for boys and men and with whom WIHSL might partner.
- ❖ Pilot, with an evaluation strategy, the anti-oppression leadership program for youth to look at biases in beliefs and incentives to encourage participation.

Goal 2: Enhanced Resources To Serve People Experiencing Gender-Based Violence

INCREASED FINANCIAL CAPACITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

- ❖ Create a fund development committee composed of Board, staff, and community members.
- ❖ Seek out diversified fund development and increased public funding.
- ❖ Strengthen political relationships.
- ❖ Grow staff ability.
- ❖ Grow Board fundraising ability.
- ❖ Hire a full-time fundraising and marketing coordinator.
- ❖ Obtain funds for fundraising software with a “moves management system”.
- ❖ Develop and implement an annual fund, major gift program, legacy program, and corporate giving program.
- ❖ Examine “out of the box” opportunities for generating funds.
- ❖ Grow the “philanthropic culture” within the organization.
- ❖ Seek partnerships that align with funding opportunities.
- ❖ Form a communication committee made up of internal and external experts to create a communication plan, respecting the needs of various audiences
- ❖ Tell your “story” and the stories of those you serve to build momentum.
- ❖ Update all marketing brochures and develop a strategy to circulate them throughout the community.

- ❖ Expand the list of brand ambassadors to include staff, clients, and volunteers and train them on the key messages of the plan and how they can help increase the community profile of WIHSL.
- ❖ Expand social media presence by creating or updating Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram pages.
- ❖ Assess staffing needs for admin and outreach and seek annual funding.
- ❖ Reinstate the volunteer program once the pandemic is over.

CREATE INCLUSIVE SPACES

- ❖ Develop a capital projects plan, ensuring all voices are heard in its creation.
- ❖ Implement the capital projects plan.
- ❖ Secure funding through grant applications.
- ❖ Explore sharing space and common services with other strategic partners.

CREATE HEALTHY WORKPLACES

- ❖ Increase staff ability through training.
- ❖ Set priorities and implement a training plan annually.

- ❖ With the Board, lobby MPP's to annually fund doubled staffing from 8:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. at the shelter, emphasizing the need for staff and resident safety in an increasingly complex environment.
- ❖ Assess staffing needs in relation to resident input and program evaluation.
- ❖ Promote an open culture between the Board and staff by sharing minutes and inviting staff to discuss their shelter and community outreach roles at Board meetings.
- ❖ Review the 13 core principles of the Canadian Standard on Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace to see what can be incorporated into the work environment: <https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/13-factors-addressing-mental-health-in-the-workplace/>.
- ❖ Incorporate wellness strategies as part of the performance-appraisal system.

Goal 3: Enhance Board Value And Contributions

CO-CREATE LEADERSHIP MODEL WITH THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

- ❖ Clearly define roles and responsibilities of board and executive director.
- ❖ Clearly define reporting requirements for the executive director.
- ❖ Define milestones for reporting on the strategic plan and joint areas of effort.
- ❖ Decide how many Board meetings are needed annually: would the work be better carried out in committees and reported to the board every other month or quarterly?
- ❖ Hold one another accountable.
- ❖ Ensure time at each meeting to discuss vision: how do you move the big needle forward and whom do you require at the table to do so?

PROVIDE EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

- ❖ Review and update by-laws to ensure agency goals and operations align therewith.
- ❖ Develop and institute best governance model and Board procedures to provide strategic, rather than operational, leadership.
- ❖ Conduct ongoing training sessions to ensure and to clarify various dimensions of Board responsibilities (e.g. legal, financial, strategic, generative).
- ❖ Establish appropriate committee frameworks and terms of reference.
- ❖ Strike an ad-hoc committee to develop a work plan to review current policies and procedures and recommend any required changes.
- ❖ Detail Board-related activities.
- ❖ Plan for Board succession.

SUCCESSFULLY RECRUIT AND ONBOARD NEW MEMBERS

- ❖ Develop a formal recruitment and onboarding strategy.
- ❖ Develop a Board orientation manual.
- ❖ Ensure Board representation from Lambton County.
- ❖ Develop a board continuity plan strategically relevant to the professional needs of the organization.
- ❖ Create a board matrix of desired competences.
- ❖ Ensure diverse representation on the Board that reflects the community.

PROVIDE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY

- ❖ Take part in presentations and marketing initiatives.

- ❖ Request the attendance of advisory groups from the community to inform the Board and executive director at Board meetings.
- ❖ Develop a social media framework and policy which may include social media seminars, a social media committee, student interns, directions on messaging for all platforms, approved spokespeople, and staff elected to speak as organizational representatives.
- ❖ Include peer advisory groups to inform the Board and shape programs and services.
- ❖ Organizational reach via direct input from clients.

APPENDIX

Community Partner Interviews

Jennifer Evans	Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS)
Michael Nolan	MCCSS
Steve Foster	MCCSS
Donna Morreau	Bluewater Health's Mental Health & Addiction Services
Dawn Flegel	Sarnia-Lambton Children's Aid Society
Tracy Rogers	Coordinating Committee on Violence Against Women
Valerie Colasanti	County of Lambton - Social Services
Deborah Munroe	Sarnia-Lambton Native Friendship Centre
Melinda Elson	Family Counselling Centre
Myles Vanni	The Haven/Inn of the Good Shephard
Karen Waddle	House of Sophrosyne
Christine LeDrew	John Howard Society
Katie Colemeco	Lambton Kent District School Board
Christine Preece	St. Clair Catholic District School Board
Melisa Johnson	County of Lambton - Housing
Colleen Bresette	Lambton OPP, Corunna OPP, Pt. Edward OPP
Jane Dalziel	Ontario Works
Jordan Laird and Alex Cunningham	Sarnia Police Service
Carrie McEachran	Rebound/The Hub
Craig McKenzie	St. Clair Child and Youth
Suzanne Isaac	Three Fires Ezhignowenmindwaa Women's Shelter
Debbie Nutson	Victim Witness Assistance
Sly Castaldi	Guelph-Wellington Women in Crisis
Jane Scheel	Haldimand & Norfolk Women's Services
Marlene Ham	Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH)