

# Free options counseling program offers support and guidance for people navigating the long-term care network

The need to understand the ins and outs of long-term care almost always signals the onset of a new stage in life for both the recipient and the caregiver—one that can arrive without warning. As a result, many people are unprepared with the information they need to make good, informed decisions. Life can suddenly become an emotional roller-coaster for everyone involved.

Long-term care planning can feel overwhelming, involving numerous agencies and a wide array of programs to meet almost every need. That's the good news. Today, there are many more and better options for long-term care than ever before, but identifying and sorting through them can be confusing. The system can seem complicated and difficult to navigate, which is why the federal and state organizations overseeing services for older people and adults living with disabilities developed the Options Counseling program in 2008. It is a free service available to anyone who needs help finding long-term care solutions and related information for themselves or a family member.

“The need for long-term care usually means that big changes have occurred, sometimes as the result of illness, a fall, or a dementia diagnosis,” says Virgen Gonzalez, Program Manager for Consumer Engagement at GLSS. She recently has been providing guidance to a man who is arranging care for his mother, who is living with Alzheimer’s disease. “The elder care landscape is broad and fragmented, making it a daunting task to plan care,” he says. “Virgen always makes herself available: sharing useful resources, connecting me with others, and helping me chart the right course for our circumstances, without all the guesswork.”



*Virgen Gonzalez,  
Program Manager for  
Consumer Engagement*

*continued on page 3...*



## A Letter from GLSS CEO Kathryn Burns

When I began my position as Chief Executive Officer here at GLSS almost two years ago, one of my highest priorities was to build stronger partnerships between GLSS and other organizations throughout the communities we serve. A second was to increase our ability to raise funds to support new initiatives—important programs that meet critical community needs but which do

not receive any public funding, relying instead on the generosity of foundations and private donors. Despite the almost immediate arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, our efforts on both fronts have been very successful, in large part thanks to you, our stakeholders and friends.

Our Phoenix Food Hub initiative—a partnership among as many as 15 local nonprofits with funding from foundations, the City, local organizations, and residents—demonstrates that success in a big way. This comprehensive, community-based response puts critical services within

*continued on page 4...*

# Phoenix Food Hub makes great strides forward GLSS and Catholic Charities to develop food pantry in downtown Lynn

**P**hoenix Food Hub is making lots of forward progress, thanks to several successful grant cycles and fundraising appeals. “The project is receiving strong support in the community and among health care entities, which see its potential to change lives and improve community health,” says GLSS’ CEO Kathryn Burns. The program is unfolding in increments but is already making a difference.

In the past few months, several Winter Farmers’ Markets, hosted by The Food Project and attended by hundreds of people, were held at the Silsbee Street building and more are planned for the coming months. People who are assessed by Lynn Community Health Center as food insecure or as having other nutrition insufficiencies are being referred for education, counseling, and information about other community resources. A state-of-the-art teaching kitchen is currently being designed to provide healthy cooking classes and educational opportunities to individuals and families. Construction will begin soon and be fully operational in the fall. In addition, a Brown Bag distribution program is offered

on site every month in conjunction with the Greater Boston Food Bank.

Most recently, GLSS and Catholic Charities Boston announced their plans to develop a food pantry in downtown Lynn as part of the emerging Phoenix Food Hub initiative. The two local nonprofits have entered into an agreement for Catholic Charities to lease approximately 3,600 square feet of space on the first floor of GLSS’ office building located at 8 Silsbee Street. The food pantry will be a key program within the community-wide collaboration among members of the City’s Food Security Task Force, offering a wide array of nutrition-related supports and resources to people of all ages.

“We are delighted to announce this important partnership,” says Kathryn Burns. “The food pantry is a critical piece of this new program, which addresses food insecurity through a systemic solution in collaboration with other social services agencies like Catholic Charities.”

Catholic Charities has deep expertise in addressing the

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*The Phoenix Food Hub space on the ground floor of 8 Silsbee Steet is being used by The Food Project to host Winter Farmers’ Markets, attracting hundreds of local residents looking for fresh, healthy produce. The markets accept HIP and SNAP in addition to cash and credit.*

## ...Phoenix Food Hub, continued

alarming rise in food insecurity in Massachusetts. It operates five other pantries throughout Eastern Massachusetts and distributed 3.5 million pounds of food last year, up 102% from pre-pandemic levels.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the food insecurity crisis in Massachusetts, increasing the urgency to get this pantry open to those in need as quickly as possible,” says Fran Troutman, director of Catholic Charities North. “Once we complete the build-out of this state-of-the-art pantry later this spring, Lynn residents will have easier access to nutritious food.”

According to Project Bread, a nonprofit that works to end hunger in the state, a record number of Massachusetts households are food insecure—double the amount pre-COVID-19. More than half a million residents—more than a quarter of them children—who are eligible for SNAP, don’t receive food stamps or other nutrition-based resources. In Lynn, assessments conducted by Lynn Community Health Center found an average 74 patients faced food insecurity concerns every week over a six-month period. GLSS estimates almost a third of those who utilize its services are at



high risk of insufficient nutrition.

GLSS is the lead agency in developing and managing Phoenix Food Hub’s on-site operations. In addition to Catholic Charities, key partners include the City of Lynn, Lynn Community Health Center, LEO, New American Center, The Food Project, Mutual Aid Lynn, and Lynn Grows. Funding partners include Mass General Brigham, Point32Health Foundation (formerly Tufts Foundation), Element Care, the City of Lynn, and many local organizations and residents.

“We hope our efforts to address social and health inequities by removing barriers to comprehensive services—including nutritious food—will become a model for other communities across the country,” Burns says. 🌱

## ...Options Counseling, continued

“Virgen has become my singular ‘go to’ person. Our family is truly grateful.”

Options Counseling was developed as part of the state’s “Community First” initiative, which promoted providing services to people in their own homes, allowing them to “age in place.” “This is really what most people would prefer, given the choice,” says GLSS’ Director of Consumer Services Holly Jarrell-Marcinelli, LICSW. “It is also a less costly option than nursing home care for most people.” Options Counseling is recommended for anyone entering an institutional setting to make sure they understand that receiving care at home might be possible. The service is also available to individuals living in nursing and rest homes who wish to explore returning to their home or other community setting when that is viable.

For those choosing care at home, GLSS’ unique case management role helps individuals and families organize and manage a broad range of services to support independent living. Home care includes things like personal care, homemaking, companions, grocery shopping, laundry,

transportation services, and personal emergency response systems, to name just a few. “Our goal is to develop a personalized care plan with consumers and their families to ensure the highest level of in-home care that always takes into consideration an individual’s needs, personal preferences, and safety,” Virgen notes. “We also provide support to caregivers through other programs to help make their job easier.”

To learn more about Options Counseling and Home Care Services, visit [www.glss.net](http://www.glss.net). 🌱

“It’s heart wrenching to watch a loved one decline, but I at least have peace of mind knowing that I’m providing my mother with the very best support.”



...A Letter from Kathryn Burns, continued

reach of those living in the Greater Lynn area. It represents the opportunity to think about a systemic solution and to work collaboratively with other social service organizations, funders, and donors to change conditions in the community.

The idea for creating a hub including a wide range of food insecurity and nutrition-related programs is a new one for the region. It seems simple but is surprisingly revolutionary: Create a place where people of all ages can not only access affordable, nutritious food but also other critical support services to help stabilize their lives. Food insecurity almost always indicates other underlying societal challenges. To address this, Phoenix Food Hub will also offer housing advocacy, mental health counseling, stress management, and mobility training, as well as healthy cooking classes, nutrition screening, and benefits counseling to those eligible for SNAP, WIC, and other nutrition-based resources.

No one organization will be able to solve the food insecurity and health disparity problems laid bare and exacerbated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic—even in a tight-knit community like Lynn. The truth is our system is frayed and difficult to navigate. But by working together, we can improve access and collectively increase our capacity to help older adults, families, and children.

Every day, the end of the pandemic feels closer—but hunger and health inequities will remain. Phoenix Food Hub is one way we as a community can come together to address these long-term needs.



Kathryn C. Burns, MHA  
Chief Executive Officer

## Donor Spotlight



HUB International New England—a national insurance, benefits, and consulting firm with a local office in Wilmington—has been a dedicated sponsor of GLSS over the years. GLSS would like to extend a special thanks to John Doherty, HUB New England Senior Vice President, for his ongoing support of GLSS programs and services. As a resident of Swampscott, John knows firsthand the impact that GLSS makes locally and told us, “We appreciate all the good work GLSS does in the Greater Lynn area.”

In the summer of 2021, HUB held a charity golf tournament fundraiser, and GLSS was chosen as one recipient of the money raised. John (seen on the left in the photo above) personally delivered a check from HUB and a check from Chicago-based CNA Insurance to the GLSS office accompanied by HUB New England Vice President Kevin Meagher (right). The checks were gratefully received by Kathryn Burns, GLSS CEO, and Doug May, GLSS CFO.

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