

**Bridge Lake Point Waunona Neighborhood Center (BLW Center) Strategic Plan 2019**  
**Created by BLW Steering Committee, Board of Directors, and Staff**  
***DRAFT 7.26.2019***

**ABOUT US**

Vera Court Neighborhood Center, Inc. (Vera Court, Inc.) is a nonprofit organization that includes Vera Court Neighborhood Center, Bridge Lake Point Waunona Neighborhood Center (BLW Center), and the Latino Academy of Workforce Development (LAWD). The mission for the overarching agency is to support its community in addressing the needs identified by its residents.

**Our Vision -**

A community that supports individuals in both strengthening their own lives and strengthening the lives of others.

**Our Values-**

Celebrate Diversity  
Take Ownership  
Be Part of Something Bigger

BLW Center, a community center on Madison's South Eastside, joined the Vera Court Neighborhood Center, Inc. 501(c)3 nonprofit in 2004. In the past, BLW Center was somewhat isolated from the community; many residents, especially along the lakeside, didn't know that BLW existed or didn't know that it offered programming relevant to their interests. At the time, BLW did not offer its own programming. Instead, outside organizations came in to run after-school programming. The place was predominantly seen as a center solely for children from lower-income families. Crime?

BLW has flourished in the last 15 years to become a "home away from home" for community members from all walks of life. Its youth programming is now

run by the center and includes early childhood, children, and teen programs.

Programming has expanded to include senior programming, a Latino Family Resource Center, food pantry, community meals and picnics, cultural events, and more. Everyday the Center is open for residents to grab a cup of coffee, read the paper, use the computers and phone, and connect with others. In the last two years, a robust BLW Steering Committee has formed, consisting of individuals who live and work in the neighborhood. While programming is mainly shaped by residents in the Bridge, Lake Point, and Waunona neighborhoods, participants come from all over Dane County. Besides providing high-need services, BLW provides a family to everyone who enters its doors. Many participants tell stories of how BLW helped them graduate from high school, obtain a higher-paying job, make a difference in their community, or connect them with the social services they need to

provide a stable home for their family. As one Steering Committee member said, “BLW changes lives.”

The BLW neighborhood is a safe, thriving community thanks largely to the partnership between community members and the community center. In the last few years, the Madison Neighborhood Indicators Project shows the neighborhood at an all-time low for crimes against persons (12 in 2018), crimes against property (38 in 2017), and crimes against society (60 in 2018).

The Steering Committee still identifies space and outreach as significant challenges. Even though participation from the Waunona community has increased, many residents still only know BLW as the place to vote. However, in order to accommodate more residents, BLW will need a larger space. The current converted apartment building is at its capacity, therefore limiting its potential to bring together everyone in the community.

## **THE FUTURE OF BLW**

A new, expanded community center will provide a place for **everyone** in the community. The new center will allow BLW to offer programming for all ages simultaneously and to increase the frequency and scope of programming. BLW will expand upon its center-run programming by including resident-led events and workshops, and services and programs led by partnering organizations (e.g. facility-use partners).

The future of BLW is not only about services though. **Our vision is that residents will not only receive support, but also give back.** Residents will receive training and resources to become leaders in our community. We see a resident-driven community center. Residents will participate on the Board of Directors, lead Steering Committees and Subcommittees, volunteer in youth programming, help at the food pantry or community meals, or lead workshops or classes of interest (e.g. knitting, Spanish).

Our long-term goal is a new community center that boosts community cohesion and safety, provides programs and services in response to the needs and interests identified by residents, is led by staff from the community and a powerful volunteer core, and is supported by local corporations and residents.

Success will be measured by reaching the following indicators in the next five years:

- Community center funded in part by the City of Madison and in part by the local residents, corporations, and foundations
- Expand donor base by X%

- Increase center usage by X%
- Offer programming and community events that encourage residents from all socioeconomic and racial backgrounds to attend, thereby shifting participation demographics to more accurately reflect those of the neighborhood
- Increase volunteer base by X%
- Increase facility use hours by X%
- Maintain a high staff retention rate of X%

Potential obstacles toward this goal include financing, siloed neighborhoods, racial or political issues, and geographical isolation from the rest of the City. BLW Center is strengthening its foundation in order to reach this goal through wider outreach (e.g. Outreach and Communications Subcommittee, focus groups, social media, community events) and resident-led Steering Committees and Subcommittees.

Our timeline to reach this goal is included below. Every year, BLW intends to host a community engagement session similar to an “Annual Meeting” to share progress on goals and gain feedback on next steps. Note that this is in addition to the listening sessions for the new community center.