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IN PERSON

Getting to know the executives who make business tick

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Maicharia Z. Weir Lytle

Title: President and CEO, United South End Settlements

Age: 44

Education: Bachelor's degree in political science, University of Connecticut; MBA, Simmons School of Management

Residence: Needham



W. MARC BERNSAU

EXECUTIVE PROFILE | MAICHARIA Z. WEIR LYTLE

Settling up

How United South End Settlements' chief is turning around a 126-year-old nonprofit

BY CATHERINE CARLOCK
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When Maicharia Z. Weir Lytle came aboard as president and CEO of the United South End Settlements, a nonprofit that originated as the fourth settlement house in the United States, the organization had no real strategic plan and money was low. It looked as if USES, an organization with roots dating back 126 years, was in danger of closing down.

After months spent listening and observing, Weir Lytle held a strategic-planning retreat with consultants and stakeholders to outline ideas to create a new vision and lift the profile of the historic organization. The retreat's attendees were getting lost in a sea of options, and the event was feeling confusing, recalls Julia Johannsen, USES' board chair.

"People were feeling demoralized, and it was palpable. And she stood up and said, 'I have a vision. Do you want to hear what it is?'" Johannsen said. "You want to have a process where people feel involved, but there comes a moment where you can't really make those decisions by committee. We hired her because we needed that person to stand up and say, 'Here's where I think this ship should be going.'"

That outlook became Vision 125, a five-year strategic plan that's wrapping up its first year of implementation. The plan aims to create high-impact programming that supports the whole family, ranging from infant care to after-school programming to

financial advising and job-coaching for parents.

The origin of the United South End Settlements dates back to the Andover House in 1892; five houses merged in 1960 to create USES. Settlement houses were originally places for immigrants to find community, as well as a place to support their children while looking for local work, Weir Lytle said.

"For us, it was going back to that, but in the 21st century – being able to modernize that and say we need to support the entire family," Weir Lytle said. "We need to support the children, giving them education and enrichment opportunities. But we also have to support the parents, so that they're having the training they need to get the jobs they need so they can have economic mobility."

That two-generation model aims to support both children and parents, she said, to make sure families can achieve stability and break the cycle of poverty. That's crucial in the city of Boston, where the median net worth of a black family is \$8, whereas a white family's median net worth is \$247,500, according to a 2015 publication from the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, Duke University and the New School.

Weir Lytle, who is biracial, was born in Chicago and grew up in Connecticut. Growing up in an interracial family helps ground her work even today, she said. Two weeks into her job as assistant director of Organization for a New Economy, the executive director left, leaving Weir Lytle, who was in her mid-20s, with the responsibility of an entire organization.

Weir Lytle knew she was going to need to bolster her business acumen if she wanted to grow as a nonprofit leader. She pursued an MBA part time, while working full time, all with a one-year-old daughter.

Marie St. Fleur worked with Weir Lytle worked to launch nonprofit LIFT Boston in Roxbury's Dudley Square neighborhood. She said Weir Lytle's respect and empathy for the communities she worked in, as well as her focus on the individual and family over numeric-based results, made her unique in the human services field.

"It wasn't just, 'I'm on assistance and will stay here.' It was about, 'this is a steppingstone to someplace else.'"

Weir Lytle's heritage gives a lens to the challenges faced in the human-services world, St. Fleur said.

"In terms of what we need to do in order to come together so that we can get to the next place in this country, she is such a representation of that in all these ways," St. Fleur said. "That's the gift, in terms of figuring out how we get together."

Since she joined USES in early 2015, the organization's fundraising has doubled from about \$900,000 annually to about \$1.8 million. USES has about 50 permanent and part-time staff members.

For Weir Lytle, it's not just one organization or nonprofit – it's working together as a community.

"We have to shine a light on it and we have to bring people into these conversations," she said. "Many of us can live our lives and not even recognize that these disparities exist or the inequalities are there."