



UMCS Summer Newsletter

UNITED METHODIST CHILDREN'S SERVICES OF WI, INC.

United in Service to our Washington Park Community

AUGUST 2022

Agency Update

If your summer is anything like the one we are experiencing here at United Methodist Children's Services (UMCS), then it is absolutely flying by! We've been extremely busy with a number of exciting new programs and initiatives underway. In this version of our newsletter, you will learn more about the conversion of our traditional food pantry into a choice-based community food center as well as the creation of our new Neighborhood Engagement Team. Among the many reasons we are so excited to move forward with these initiatives is because they each represent considerable advancements in the fulfillment of our mission to serve the community in ways that are responsive to real needs, that elevate the voices and perspectives of neigh-

borhood residents, and that honor the dignity and value of all those who come through our doors.

We also wanted to take a moment to recognize our colleague, Leah Laven-Wilson, Director of Housing and Social Services and social worker extraordinaire, as she celebrates an incredible fifteen years of humble, dedicated service to UMCS! Though Leah shuns the spotlight, it is no secret how much she means to the agency, to her colleagues and partners, and, most importantly, to the families we serve. Under her leadership, the UMCS Supportive Housing Program has weathered the inevitable ups and



downs, embraced the need to adapt and evolve, and distinguished itself as a truly mission-driven endeavor offering compassionate, expert care and quality, affordable housing to some of Milwaukee's most vulnerable families.

Congratulations, Leah, thank you, and here's to many more!

As always, we welcome you to come visit us here in the Washington Park neighborhood to learn more about all of the work that is taking place and to see some of the many ways in which you can get involved. We wish you all a peaceful and enjoyable rest of the summer and thank you sincerely for your ongoing support to the work and mission of UMCS.

Our Vision for the Future: From Pantry to Community Food Center

In 2022, UMCS plans to bring the connections made through food to the forefront of our programming in the emergency food pantry. Our vision is to transform our traditional food pantry model into one in which Washington Park residents can gather comfortably to experience fellowship, support, and community. **This new space will prioritize dignity and choice in a relaxed, community-centered environment where neighbors can meet for a cup of coffee, connect with one another and**

resource providers, and select their favorite items from a greater variety of fresh, healthy foods.

To execute this vision, UMCS will take a phased approach to converting our current food pantry program from prepacked boxes into an entirely choice shopping experience for the community. Phase 1 will involve transforming the large pantry area into more of a grocery store shopping experience, with shelving units, fresh food displays, refrigerators and freezers where individuals can come choose the foods that best align with their family's needs

and preferences. Phase 2 will include additional renovations so that we can more effectively host community service providers and create better systems for food storage and the re-stocking of our shopping area.

To complement the new choice shopping program, UMCS will also renovate the small kitchenette in our community room into a full-use kitchen where cooking demonstrations, nutrition classes, and community meals can be held. During pantry hours, the community room will be a place where neighbors can enjoy a cup of coffee, prepare for their shopping experience and meet with community partners to address other important needs. **Our hope is that the space will be one that is truly warm, inviting, and comfortable for all who visit.**



Meet UMCS's new Neighborhood Engagement Team (NET)

This spring UMCS welcomed its new Neighborhood Engagement Team (NET), consisting of Adrian Spencer, Director of Neighborhood Engagement, Monica Purifoy, Community Organizer, and Zoe Whorrall, Community Health Worker.

The NET has worked diligently to actively meet residents at their front doors and out in the community through weekly outreach, including door-to-door conversations, pop-up resource fairs on vacant lots, and weekly casual cleanups around the neighborhood. The NET has welcomed others to join their weekly Thursday door-to-door outreach sessions and has so far had support from great partners such as Fathers Making Progress, Milwaukee Fresh Food Coalition, The Parenting Network, Urban Ecology Center, and more. These efforts

have led to the team meeting over 200 residents and increasing the monthly resident attendance to the Washington Park Monthly Meeting from 3 residents in April to 20 in July!

Other Neighborhood Engagement Highlights:

- Organizing African Drumming Circles with Center for Leadership of Afrikan Women's Wellness
- Hosting blood donation drive in partnership with Versiti Blood Centers
- Activation of the UMCS community garden with support from Teens Grow Greens
- Leading the neighborhood housing surveys with support from Washington



Park residents as part of the Reclaiming Our Neighborhoods (RON) Coalition



UMCS Community Events MAY/JUNE 2022

Thank you to our 2022 Community Event Sponsors!



◆ May 18, 2022 **Community Speaker Series #1** Caroline Carter, Raw Vegan Chef



◆ June 8, 2022 **Community Speaker Series #2** John Gurda, Milwaukee Historian



◆ June 24, 2022 **A Day of Celebration: 2nd Annual Community Block Party**

Are you interested in learning more about including UMCS as a beneficiary in your will, living trust, insurance, or retirement plan?

Making an estate gift is a great way to continue your generosity and leave a legacy that aligns with your passions and values. To learn more about planned giving at UMCS, please contact Rebecca Gregory, Director of Development, at 414-509-1055 or rebecca.gregory@umcs-wi.org

