



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 13th, 2023

United Methodist Children's Services Announces New Name: ***Rooted & Rising - Washington Park***

Milwaukee, WI – In a transformative move aimed at embracing the ever-evolving needs and aspirations of the Washington Park neighborhood, United Methodist Children's Services is thrilled to announce its new name – ***Rooted & Rising - Washington Park***. This name change represents a significant milestone in our organization's rich history, celebrating our foundational roots while embracing the promise of a brighter future for all.

Since its establishment in 1962 as a nonprofit social service agency of the United Methodist Church, *Rooted & Rising - Washington Park* has been dedicated to uplifting and empowering those they serve. In the early 1990s, the agency put down roots in Milwaukee's Washington Park neighborhood and has proudly called it home ever since. As we celebrate this momentous occasion, we enthusiastically renew our commitment to the Washington Park neighborhood and to working collaboratively with residents, business owners and other partners to be a beacon of hope and a catalyst for positive change.

This new name reflects the agency's determination to work in true partnership with individuals and families in the Washington Park neighborhood to establish strong, resilient roots, to continue growing, and to rise to reach their full potential.

"I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to our partners from the Washington Park neighborhood and across the city, the current and former staff and Board members, and especially our long-standing, devoted supporters throughout the United Methodist Church in Wisconsin, for their input and guidance throughout this process", said Bill Schmitt, *Rooted & Rising* Executive Director. "We embrace this change as an opportunity to build upon the legacy of those who came before us, to broaden and reinforce connections with neighborhood residents and partners, and to better live out our mission. We invite you to join us in celebrating this exciting new chapter in our organization's history. Together, we will build a stronger, more resilient Washington Park community, firmly rooted in its history and rising to meet the future."

“I am deeply grateful to celebrate United Methodist Children Services’ recent 60th anniversary”, said Bishop Hee-Soo Jung of the Wisconsin Conference of the United Methodist Church. “The agency has been a landmark in the Washington Park neighborhood, addressing major justice issues of housing, food insecurity, and childcare. They have been incredible partners in ministry. I look forward to our continued work as a new name, *Rooted & Rising*, ushers in a new era. May God continue to bless our making a difference in the world.”

Rooted & Rising - Washington Park operates a wide range of essential programs designed to meet the diverse needs and priorities of our neighbors:

1. **Quality, Affordable Housing:** Multifaceted housing program, consisting of a 72-unit supportive rental housing portfolio and new development initiatives to promote homeownership, is predicated on the belief that all families deserve safe, affordable, and high-quality housing as an essential foundation upon which to meet basic needs and build for the future.
2. **Neighborhood Engagement:** Neighborhood Engagement Team (NET) supports residents and collaborates with partners to build community, enhance the quality of life, advocate for change and shape the future of the Washington Park neighborhood.
3. **Childcare Services:** Growing Tree Children’s Center offers high-quality, affordable early childhood education, ensuring that parents can pursue their dreams while their children learn and grow in a safe, caring and compassionate environment.
4. **Food Security:** The Community Food Center is a dignity-centered, warm, and welcoming place for residents to access free and nutritious food and other basic need items, receive direct assistance from service providers, and get connected to other resources and community-building opportunities at the neighborhood level.
5. **Social Work Assistance:** Social work outreach focuses on helping individuals and families meet basic needs, overcome crises and unexpected challenges, and strive to achieve their dreams.

For more information about *Rooted & Rising - Washington Park* and our programs, please visit our website at www.rootedandrisingwp.org or contact Bill Schmitt, Executive Director, at 414-344-1818 or william.schmitt@rootedandrisingwp.org



A Social Service Agency of the United Methodist Church founded in 1962



Rooted & Rising – Washington Park
Name Change – Questions & Answers
October 2023

Why did you change your name?

- The “UMCS” name has served us well for many years, but over time we heard consistent feedback from many residents, partners and supporters that the name was confusing and difficult to remember, lacking a connection to the Washington Park neighborhood that we have served and called home since the early 1990s, and not representative of our mission and work – i.e. although we operate a childcare center and provide a range of services to children and families, we are not a “children’s service” agency, as was the original vision of the agency when it was founded in 1962. Outside of long-time supporters and partners, the agency has had relatively low name recognition throughout the city. There has been limited awareness of our work and mission amongst key stakeholders, including the donor community, government agencies, community-based organizations and even neighborhood residents living nearby. This low awareness and recognition have been limiting factors when it comes to expanding our base of support, raising additional funding and developing new partnerships to better serve those in need. To sustain our work and mission over the longer term, the Board considered it increasingly important that we broaden our appeal, diversify funding sources and secure a broad base of support throughout the neighborhood and the city of Milwaukee.

Why Rooted & Rising Washington Park?

- This new name reflects the agency’s determination to work in true partnership with individuals and families in the Washington Park neighborhood to establish strong, resilient roots, to continue growing, and to rise to reach their full potential. The history of the agency is one of constant change and evolution, and our move to the Washington Park neighborhood in 1991 was the start of a special and enduring commitment to this community, one that has manifested itself through the direct services that we provide onsite, the relationships that we have built with our many partners, and the support that we offer throughout the neighborhood. We are excited to share our new name that reflects an uplifting, asset-based and positive vision for the future of the agency and our neighborhood.
 - Please see below the revised *Rooted & Rising* mission statement

Does this mean you aren't connected with the United Methodist Church any longer?

- Since its founding in 1962, *Rooted & Rising* has had a longstanding covenant relationship with the United Methodist Church Wisconsin Conference. That covenant was most recently renewed in May 2023 and continues to provide a guiding framework for our relationship and shared mission of service to others. As the agency embraces its new name of *Rooted & Rising – Washington Park*, the agency's leadership is dedicated to ensuring that our fundamental relationship with the United Methodist Church will not only continue, but also grow and expand into new opportunities for partnership in the years to come. Historically, and up until the present day, a large number of our volunteers, donors and supporters have been introduced to our work through their connection to the United Methodist Church and have put their faith into action with their support of our mission and service to all those in need regardless of their background. We are extremely grateful for that legacy of support and look forward to continuing to build on that success for many years to come.

Does this name change have anything to do with the UMC disaffiliation process?

- No, the name change to *Rooted & Rising – Washington Park* was not at all connected to the UMC disaffiliation process that played out over the past several years.

What was the process of changing your name? Who was consulted?

- In early 2021, the Mission Advancement Committee, a sub-committee of the Board of Directors, initiated a process to consult current and former staff and Board members, neighborhood residents and partners, UMC leadership, donors and other stakeholders. A total of 19 interviews were conducted in 2021 and early 2022, the feedback from which eventually resulted in a recommendation to the Board of Directors to formally launch an effort to explore renaming options for the agency. In December 2022, the Zizzo Group was hired to lead this initiative. Building on those earlier interviews, in the early part of 2023 Zizzo Group conducted a series of focus groups and individual interviews with a broader group of 33 individuals, including staff, Board members, residents, UMC leadership, community partners, donors and volunteers. Informally, dozens of other supporters and friends weighed in and shared their feedback with staff and Board members. With the support and guidance of Zizzo Group, the new name and logo were identified, selected and affirmed by senior staff and Board members during the spring and summer of 2023.

Is the focus of the agency going to change? Are services changing?

- No, the name change has not altered the focus of our work in the community or the key programs and services that we offer onsite. Our updated mission statement includes similar language to the previous mission statement, but it has been revised to better reflect the full range of programs and services that we offer and our renewed commitment to resident engagement and community partnerships to support all who live, work and recreate in the Washington Park neighborhood.
 - See below the revised *Rooted & Rising* mission statement.

What impact does the name change have on the overall services that the agency is providing?

- *Rooted & Rising* will continue to offer the same programs and services – see above response.

Does this change the location of who we serve? (i.e. Washington Park vs other neighborhoods)

- No, the agency has called the Washington Park neighborhood home since 1991, and this name change reflects *Rooted & Rising's* deep and enduring commitment to Washington Park and all of the residents, businesses and partners who call it home.

How do we support the work that you are doing?

- There are so many different ways that you can support our work, including all the ways that so many have already done over the past sixty years. Here are just some of the ways in which you can get connected and support the work of *Rooted & Rising – Washington Park*:
 - Volunteer – we have opportunities for individual and group volunteers, both on a recurring basis and for one-time activities or events
 - Organize at your church, school, community group or workplace a collection of food items (fresh and/or non-perishable), winter clothes, or hygiene items
 - Share the fresh produce that you grow in your home or community garden
 - Attend events and activities that *Rooted & Rising* and its partners organize onsite and throughout the neighborhood
 - Donate your furniture for new families moving into *Rooted & Rising's* housing program
- Make a financial gift to the agency in the form of a one-time or recurring donation, in-kind contribution, response to special appeal or planned giving
- Promote our work within your family, church, school, community group or workplace; invite *Rooted & Rising* staff and Board members to attend and speak at your church service, annual meeting, social gathering, etc...

Can someone come talk to my organization about *Rooted & Rising - Washington Park*?

- Yes, absolutely, *Rooted & Rising* staff and Board members welcome the chance to connect with you and your groups, share the latest news and provide opportunities to get involved.

What is your new contact information?

- The office address and main reception phone numbers are unchanged:
 - *Rooted & Rising - Washington Park*
3940 W. Lisbon Ave.
Milwaukee, WI 53208
414-344-1818

- Previous “UMCS” email addresses for staff will continue to function for the coming months, but all staff email addresses have transitioned over to the “rootedandrisingwp.org” naming convention.
- The new agency website can be found at www.rootedandrisingwp.org
 - The new site is undergoing its finishing touches and will soon be fully operational, but you can go there for a preview and to access contact information
- Please contact Bill Schmitt, Executive Director, at william.schmitt@rootedandrisingwp.org with any additional questions or requests that you may have.

If someone needs services, how do they get connected?

- Please consult the new *Rooted & Rising* website, which will be up and running very soon, but in the meantime please give us a call at 414-344-1818 or stop by to visit anytime at 3940 W. Lisbon Ave.

Mission Statement

Rooted & Rising – Washington Park believes in the dignity, potential and worth of all people and is dedicated to helping individuals and families meet their basic needs, establish stable foundations, and pursue their dreams. We are united in our mission to build a nurturing, thriving community where all people feel welcome, supported and a sense of belonging.

Through quality housing, childcare, food security, basic resources, and neighborhood engagement programming, we are committed to listening to and elevating the voices of our neighbors, serving with humility and compassion, and working with our partners to build a more stable, equitable and prosperous community for all Washington Park residents. We walk alongside our neighbors to help put down roots and rise to reach our community’s fullest potential.

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