



United Methodist
Community House

Creating
**A PLACE TO
BELONG**



SOMETHING WE ALL *Need*

At United Methodist Community House (UMCH), we believe in creating a place where no child will ever miss their chance for the best start in life. Where no parent will have to choose between keeping their children safe or keeping a job. And where no older adult will ever be lonely and isolated, longing for connection and help.

For more than 100 years, UMCH has been a place where thousands of people have found the true essence of community. But we know we can—and must—do more.

Filled with faith in our community and in each other, we have a plan to help even more people find a place to belong.



Community is more than just the place we live. Community is where we find belonging and people who care for us. It's what makes us feel safe and gives us strength.

OUT OF *Room*

For decades, United Methodist Community House has been a community center of support and a place to access critical resources for people living in Kent County. But the needs of our youngest and oldest neighbors have continued to outpace our facility.

NO SPACE

Childcare for ages 0-2 is desperately lacking throughout Kent County, but especially in our geographic area. UMCH is centrally located amidst some of the highest-needs neighborhoods in our community. The need is all around us—in every direction you look, there are disparities.

In our neighborhood alone, there is only one space for every ten infants and toddlers. That means nine out of ten children ages 0-2 have nowhere to go and no one to care for them while parents are at work.

When families don't have access to childcare, it means parents can't go to work or back to school. They earn less money or none at all. It becomes difficult or impossible to afford housing, healthcare, and other essential needs. It impacts every aspect of their life, and our community too.

In 2018, we repurposed space in our building to expand childcare for this age group. Every space was filled in a matter of hours. But we've run out of room and exhausted our options to create more space in our current facility.



The day I learned I was pregnant was the happiest and worst day of my life. I was excited to have a child, but I knew I would struggle to afford the childcare and there were no openings to be found. My joyful news also felt like a 2-year sentence to unemployment.



WRONG SPACE

The needs of older adults in our community are growing, too. Everything from formal surveys to organic client conversations has affirmed that seniors need a place dedicated to them and their unique needs.

They desire somewhere to go to find help meeting basic needs, as well as space where they can gather with their peers and build relationships. They want a place where they can find a sense of purpose.

Kent County offers a wealth of resources for older adults. But it lacks a central location dedicated to accessing those resources.

Here at UMCH, our current facility was never built to be a senior activity center. It was designed to be a congregate dining site. True to the architecture of its time, it feels institutional, with cinderblock walls and no windows to let in natural light.

Still, UMCH clients think of this space as their home away from home.

They arrive each morning and stay until late afternoon. This is where they *choose to be*—even without windows—because it is theirs.

But we know we can do better. We know we can do more.



From that very first day, I felt like I belonged. UMCH welcomed me and gave me a new sense of community—a sense of belonging. With their help, I regained my independence. They gave me back my life!

BETTER SPACE

The solution to both of these problems is not *easy*, but it is *simple*.

By talking and listening to clients, community members, and our trusted partners, a clear vision emerged. We need appropriately designed space to accommodate the specific needs of our oldest and youngest neighbors.

With a century of experience behind us and a new plan before us, we know what it will take to move our community forward. We just need room to grow and you.



“CREATING A PLACE TO BELONG” Campaign

The “Creating A Place to Belong” campaign is a visionary plan to transform and improve the lives of children, families, and seniors throughout Kent County.

Our plan includes creating a new space across from our current home. There we will do more than just expand our existing high-demand programs. We will create something new that has been missing in our broader community.

We will lean into our expertise of serving our community’s youngest and oldest. We will address the gaps to meet their unique needs. And in the process, we will inform intergenerational research by collaborating with community and academic partners.

This is a plan to make sure more children can thrive, more families can work, and more seniors can be healthy in mind, body, and spirit.



A PLACE FOR CHILDREN

With additional space, we will be able to serve more children of all ages.

In the new building, we will add classrooms to serve our youngest children ages birth to two, allowing us to more than double our participants from 32 to 72 children in that age group.

The rooms and surrounding spaces will be specifically designed for early childhood education to optimize development and learning. We will add a green-filled courtyard play area. Children will be surrounded by the natural environment whether inside or out.

We will continue to utilize our current facility to care for children as well. By repurposing and renovating our space, we will double the number of three and four-year-olds served from 32 to 64 participants.

We will have room for up to 30 drop-in care participants for families in crisis and experiencing homelessness—a special pilot program offered in partnership with Community Rebuilders and Family Promise of Grand Rapids.

We will also launch a second-shift childcare program. UMCH will be one of the few centers in the city offering evening care for parents who work second shift.

SERVING MORE CHILDREN, BETTER

Using both our current facility and new space, we will increase space for:

- 
0-2 Year Olds
 Currently: 32
 Adding: 40
- 
3-4 Year Olds
 Currently: 32
 Adding: 32
- 
2nd Shift Care
 Adding 16 New Spaces
- 
Crisis Drop-In Care
 30 Spaces
(added in 2021)





A PLACE FOR SENIORS

In the new building, we will add 46 units of affordable rental housing for adults aged 60 and older, filling a huge need in our city.

We will also create a senior activity center specifically designed to meet the physical, cognitive, and social-emotional needs of older adults.

The senior center will include a dining hall for meals offered every day of the week. It will have a kitchen allowing us to bring food service in-house. This will be more cost effective and improve quality control. But more importantly, it means that clients will have fresher, healthier meal options prepared for them on site instead of heat-and-serve meals shipped from elsewhere.

We will have a dedicated fitness area, including group exercise space, and a small therapy pool. Maintaining health and fitness is critical for all seniors. While there are options around the city, few, if any, are dedicated solely to older adults with a sliding fee scale that makes it affordable to everyone.

The new facility will also include an arts and crafts studio, computer lab, and game room. We will expand our existing programming and further develop our partnerships with other organizations to host their programs on site.

Our plan ultimately will allow us to increase our services for older adults by tenfold—from around 50 seniors daily to 500.

NEW BENEFITS FOR OLDER ADULTS

-  46 Units of Affordable Rental Housing
-  Healthy Meal Options
-  Fitness area, gym and walking track
-  Therapy Pool
-  Arts Studio
-  Computer Lab
-  Game Room
-  Intergenerational Programming
-  Community Gathering Space
-  Increase from serving 50 to 500 seniors daily

A PLACE TO BRIDGE GENERATIONS

We will create a place where our youngest children can learn from the wisdom and lived experience of older adults, and where seniors can be fueled by the energy and unbridled joy of new life.

The new facility will have space for intergenerational programming and learning, with laboratory space for intergenerational research.

The research space is being planned in partnership with an interdisciplinary team of representatives from several local colleges and universities, including Grand Valley State University, Western Michigan University, and Calvin University. We are working with an architect who specializes in intergenerational design.

Additionally, we will have a permanent home for our new Fresh Market, launched in the spring of 2021, that is open to the public with affordable, locally-grown produce. The market will also supply fresh, healthy foods for the child development center and senior dining hall meals.





A PLACE WHERE INNOVATION MEETS *Inclusion*

For decades, the creative solutions that started at UMCH have extended far beyond our reach—a ripple effect changing countless lives. When it comes to supporting our community, we are never afraid to be the first to try something, and we make sure to share what we learn along the way so the whole community benefits.

The solutions developed at UMCH have staying power because they are deeply rooted in real community needs.

In 2018, as new information about the emerging needs of children and seniors became available, we rolled up our sleeves to consider ways we could tackle the problem. We turned to our greatest source of wisdom for feedback—the community.

We embarked on a listening tour with more than 300 individuals representing a wide range of interests to be as inclusive as possible: residents and community leaders, local government representatives, school superintendents, community-based organizations, and more.

This collective wisdom shaped our vision and informed our plans. A feasibility study further refined our concept, and continued conversations are helping the final design to evolve.

While we are leading this effort, we aren't going it alone. This is a collaborative response to a greater need that extends well beyond our home in the Southeast Community to deep into the heart of the city and throughout the county.

There is a gap we are ready to fill and learning that we are prepared to share.

THE TIME IS *Now*

Grand Rapids cannot be a world-class city without resources, opportunities, and space for our youngest and oldest neighbors to thrive.



THE TIME IS NOW FOR CHILDREN

Early childhood education is important for healthy child and family development.

Children with access to high quality early childhood education services are healthier, perform better in school, and have higher income potential throughout their lives. Yet still too many are missing their chance.

As we shift our perspective to economic recovery in the wake of COVID-19, everyone is becoming more aware of the importance of childcare for our workforce and economy.

In fact, making childcare more affordable to lower-wage earners has become a top priority of local and state government to address the massive labor shortage.

But affordability is just one part of access. Families also need to be able to find available childcare spaces. And in Kent County, there simply aren't enough spaces available.

Our plan will nearly double the capacity of our Child Development Center, with the biggest increase in infant and toddler seats where the need is the greatest.

THE TIME IS NOW FOR SENIORS

Grand Rapids is Michigan’s second largest city. With more than 25% of residents above the age of 50 and a wide array of resources for seniors, Grand Rapids surprisingly still lacks a dedicated center designed specifically to address the unique needs of older adults—especially those who are already underserved.

The population of seniors in Michigan is growing rapidly and the City of Grand Rapids has committed to becoming a leader in age-friendly planning and practices.

But it is up to all of us to make sure they have healthy, safe, affordable places to live, to access support, and to feel connection and belonging so they can continue to thrive.



Older adults are essential to our shared strength and wellbeing. They are the voices of our collective wisdom. They are our teachers. They are the connection to our past.

Our plan expands the concept of “aging in place” beyond just the home where seniors live. Our plan will help seniors age in place in community—with strength, health, and wholeness.



96,410

Kent County Rapids residents are aged 65+.

Source: Michigan Population Projections by County through 2045



Projected population of residents 65+ is **115,482 BY 2025.**

Source: Michigan Population Projections by County through 2045



98% OF SENIORS say Grand Rapids needs a dedicated senior center for adults aged 50+.

Source: Survey conducted by AARP of Michigan

CREATING A PLACE

To Belong

Everybody deserves to feel deeply rooted in community. For more than 100 years, UMCH has seen children, families, and seniors transform their lives through the power of community and belonging.

We have seen parents breathe a sigh of relief when they finally find a child development center they can afford—and that they can trust.

We have seen children blossom academically, socially, and emotionally as they are deeply cared for and loved.

We have seen families become stronger and more stable as they are able to go back to work and pursue big goals like college degrees and homeownership.

And we've seen older adults regain a sense of self and purpose they were afraid had been lost.

These are the gifts that come from belonging. These are the gifts that come out of community.

A PLACE THAT NEEDS *You*

This is a plan to make sure more children can thrive, more families can work, and more seniors can be healthy in mind, body, and spirit.

But this is about more than that, too. This is about building a stronger community.

When people have access to the support they need, children succeed in school and beyond. Their parents contribute to a strong and vibrant workforce. And when they can remain deeply rooted here, older adults stabilize our community and share their wisdom with all of us.

But none of this is possible without you. When you support this campaign, you help build a stronger, healthier, and more resilient community for everyone.

Won't you join us?





We believe equity is a direct outcome of inclusion,
so we emphasize cultural relevance in all we do.
Our commitment to this area and the people
who live here is deep and far-reaching.

*People see a reflection of themselves at UMCH—
no matter who they are.*



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