



# UMCS Spring Newsletter

UNITED METHODIST CHILDREN'S SERVICES OF WI, INC.

An Update from Milwaukee's Beautiful Washington Park Neighborhood

APRIL 2020

Don't forget to like us on Facebook for more updates; <https://www.facebook.com/umcswi>. You can also designate 'Methodist Children's Services' on Amazon Smile as your charity of choice and support the work of UMCS while you shop.

## Adjusting to the Challenging Reality of Coronavirus/COVID-19

Just like families and organizations are doing across the city and around the world, the UMCS team is rallying together to support one another and the people we serve during these challenging times. We wanted to let you know that UMCS is closely adhering to guidance from officials and health experts while also seeking to strike an appropriate balance between suspending activities and ensuring that we are able to provide

critical assistance to those in need and who may be most affected by the Coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic.

At this time the **UMCS Emergency Food Pantry** remains open, and we intend to keep it open over the coming weeks in accordance with revised guidelines to reduce risks. We also continue to provide vital support to the families residing in our affordable housing program and promote key community health

messaging. All other programs have unfortunately been put on hold until this crisis subsides.

We join all of you in looking forward to better days on the horizon. As you will see from the rest of this newsletter, there is a lot to be excited about when those better days return. As always, we thank you for your continued support. **We will get through this together!**

~ Bill Schmitt, Executive Director

## Friendly New Faces at UMCS

The UMCS family keeps growing! UMCS is thrilled to have welcomed three new members to our team in recent months. Together, Gabi, Shantel and Bill each bring a wealth of experience and positive energy to build upon the wonderful work that UMCS has been doing in the Washington Park neighborhood and other parts of the city for nearly 60 years.

The UMCS Board of Directors an-

nounced the hiring of **Bill Schmitt** as its permanent Executive Director, in February, 2020. Having recently returned home to Milwaukee after more than 13 years working overseas in the humanitarian field, Bill is most excited by the prospect of working in collaboration with residents, businesses and other organizations, forging new partnerships and expanding the range and quality of services that UMCS can

offer to the Washington Park neighborhood. He has quickly come to deeply admire the mission, staff, volunteers and supporters of UMCS and is eager to put in the hard work to build relationships and serve those in need.

A former staff member, **Shantel Hendricks** returned to UMCS in October 2019 as the Community Health Worker. Those of you who have already met Shantel know that she brings energy, warmth, and genuine care and com-

passion for all that she does, whether that be hosting monthly health and wellness seminars or ensuring that residents get connected to the resources they need to improve their health outcomes, reduce reliance on emergency room assistance, and pursue a path of wellness for the whole person.

The New Year brought us a wonderful gift in the form of **Gabi Taylor-Hart**, our intrepid new Community Organizer for the Washington Park neighborhood. In just a few short months on the job, Gabi has distinguished herself as someone fiercely committed to the community and to doing whatever it takes to make things happen. Her role at the agency is to connect people with resources, build relationships with other agencies in the area and to be the point person for community concerns and issues. In addition to organizing and leading monthly neighborhood coordination and safety meetings, Gabi will also be leading community clean-ups, organizing events and supporting other resident-led initiatives.

Together, Gabi, Shantel and Bill each bring a wealth of experience and positive energy...





## Community Engagement

We closed out 2019 with some fun-filled community events. In November, UMCS hosted our 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Chili-Fest: Health and Safety Resource Fair, a gathering of neighborhood residents, community organizations, local business and elected officials to share resources and enjoy each other's company. The Milwaukee Fire Department was on the scene with one of their ladder trucks for the kids to enjoy and to help us promote key safety messages for the upcoming winter months. From a

star-studded list of 16 competitors, the Chili Champion, Mr. Bob Morris, was crowned. Stay tuned for more news about the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Chili Fest, which is tentatively slated for October 2020!

In December we hosted our annual holiday party for the families that reside in our 72 units of affordable housing. Always one of our favorite events of the year, those gathered celebrated with crafts and games, Christmas carols, laughter and a delicious meal, with each

family going home with a book, winter hats and mittens, and gift cards.

Community engagement in 2020 got off to a roaring start, with UMCS stepping up to serve as a Complete Count Committee for the 2020 Census, reinvigorating the Washington Park Monthly Neighborhood Meetings, and organizing a variety of health, wellness and community-building events. We are eager to kick it back into high gear as soon as health and safety conditions allow!

## New Partnerships to Celebrate!

UMCS is incredibly proud of the wide range of services and support that the agency provides to families in our Washington Park neighborhood and surrounding areas. We also recognize that families are in need of many other services and expertise that we do not directly offer. As an anchor institution with a deep commitment to the neighborhood, UMCS knows that we best meet that commitment when we welcome partners into our space in a collaborative effort to expand access and improve the quality of services.

We could not be more pleased to be one of the pilot sites for the **Community Care-A-Van** in partnership with **Froedtert Hospital & the Medical College of Wisconsin** and the **Milwaukee Bucks**. On Wednesday afternoon each week during

the UMCS Food Pantry hours, the Care-A-Van is on site and staffed with nurses to assist residents with basic health care screenings and to connect them to other resources.

UMCS has also launched an exciting new partnership with the **Mobile Legal Clinic**, a project of Marquette University Law School and the Milwaukee Bar Association that provides vital civil legal aid by bringing volunteer lawyers and law students to community agencies in neighborhoods that are marginalized and isolated. The first mobile clinic at UMCS took place on March 11th and was a huge success. We look forward to building upon this partnership in the months to come.

On any given food pantry day, you

are also likely to find **ACCESS** workers helping residents with FoodShare benefits, **Hunger Task Force** colleagues offering healthy food samples, health insurance representatives linking families to coverage options, and research teams from the **Medical College of Wisconsin's Center for Advancing Population Studies (CAPS)** offering unique opportunities to participate in programs seeking to better understand and treat diseases and afflictions that disproportionately impact neighborhoods like Washington Park.

