‘Ambassadors of their lives:’
Group tackles housing, childcare, key issues in GR

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GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. — A coalition in Grand Rapids hopes to create “substantive change” that addresses some of the key issues people in the area face.

Together West Michigan is a local, nonpartisan partnership of 20 faith-based and community groups.

The coalition wants to use its platforms and resources to empower people in Grand Rapids who often have felt ignored when it comes to important community decisions.

“I just feel like folks have lost hope,” said Jamie Dalton, the founder of I Matter, We Matter. “Trust has been broken. It’s so important to let people know that they are the ambassadors of their lives by providing that motivation, that encouragement.”

Dalton’s organization, I Matter, We Matter, offers free mental health services to people in the 49507.

Oakdale Park Church, where Peter TeWinkle is a teaching pastor, is another organization included in the coalition.
“Everybody needs to know they have agency, they have a voice, and this is a vehicle for them to use it,” TeWinkle told FOX 17.

A local business owner started the effort back in 2018. It gained momentum this last spring after coalition members met with 1,350 Grand Rapids community members, over a three-month period, to learn about the pressures they encounter each day.

Through listening sessions, Together West Michigan identified six key issues: mental health, housing, transportation, childcare, immigration and refugee matters, and public safety.

“Rather than prioritizing an issue and trying to get people on board, the organization began with relationships and allowed the issues to come up and out of those conversations that were being had,” TeWinkle added.

Together West Michigan organized an event to further discuss its findings, while attracting people who can help create concrete plans.

The event is scheduled for Thursday, June 30 from 6-8:30 p.m. It will include a walk, followed by several speakers at Westminster Presbyterian Church.

17 elected officials plan to attend, including Congressman Peter Meijer. Together West Michigan says 500 people already registered for the event.

“We are definitely hoping to get the buy-in from elected officials to join us and give us their support in whatever that may be, so we can have some forward movement on these issues,” Dalton told FOX 17.

To learn more about the coalition or Thursday’s event, click here.