

Together



West Michigan



ORGANIZATIONAL FOCUS AREAS

CHILDCARE

MENTAL
HEALTH

HOUSING

IMMIGRANTS &
REFUGEES

NEIGHBORHOOD
SAFETY

2024 INAUGURAL
ANNUAL
REPORT

In 2024, Together West Michigan narrowed its issue area focus, reflecting the interests of its members.



The broken model of **childcare** that costs many parents more than they can afford while paying providers far less than they are worth has caused a childcare crisis. In 2023, Kent County had a shortage of 20,000 childcare spots for families seeking them.¹



Spanish-speaking clergy and members report a tidal wave of **mental health** concerns - especially anxiety, depression, and suicide attempts. At the same time, those who are struggling are not seeking help because of the stigma associated with mental health in the Latine community.



Costs keep going up on existing **housing** units, increasing pressure on medium and lower income residents and driving some out of housing altogether. As Grand Rapids strives to attract more people, housing availability is not keeping up, especially at the "bottom" of the housing market.



Immigrants and refugees are struggling as they make a life in our community. Difficulties trying to learn a new language while navigating a new life, finding work, paying bills, and getting transportation abound. A top concern among all is the workplace, where frequent stories of discrimination and abuse because of their language or skin color, along with continual low pay, abound.



A new concern emerging in conversation with member institutions in the Third Ward of Grand Rapids is the topics of **neighborhood safety**. Member institutions wanted to build relationships with their neighbors, understand their concerns, and work together to do something concrete about them. These partners happen to be located in some of the lowest voter turnout precincts in a historically under-invested area of Grand Rapids.

We are a broad-based power organization focused on **citizen-led action** through leadership development and building relationships across the lines that typically divide us.



Our work, by the numbers



READY BY FIVE MILLAGE

1400 millage increase support cards
2000 voter pledge cards

20000 landslide vote margin to renew millage



BILINGUAL PARISH ENGAGEMENT

3 sessions of conversations with Spanish-speaking community members on mental health basics



ACTUAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING

2+ hours of public comment time with elected leaders regarding housing

60+ participants engaged in these sessions

100+ letters to GR Commission supporting affordable housing expansion



HELPING NEW AMERICANS

60 Congolese community members engaged via house meetings

100+ participants in 5-day Spanish-language organizing and power-building training



VOTER TURNOUT OUTREACH

1600 doors knocked to build up voter turnout to empower demands for re-investment

We have drastically slowed voter turnout decline with a district-level focused, *repeatable* model of success.

Where turnout in Grand Rapids overall decreased significantly since the presidential election of 2020 and 2016, Together West Michigan was able to effectively **combat voter decline in Precinct 65**, which only dropped 1% from the record breaking turnout in 2020 and actually increased over 2016 levels. Most importantly, this means that the **gap between Precinct 65 and the rest of Grand Rapids shrunk by 4%** - a statistically significant margin for the first year organizing in this fashion on a precinct level.

How did it happen?

Together, **over 149 representatives from 19 member institutions** around the city participated in over a dozen neighborhood walks. We knocked on over 1,600 doors and **connected with over 4,000 neighbors**. Most importantly, this get-out-the-vote work enabled churches in these areas to have personal conversations with hundreds of neighbors, **over 215 of those neighbors signed commitment cards to vote**. These conversations have enabled our leaders to build a new directory of neighborhood contacts and the issues most pressing for families that leaders in Southeast Grand Rapids are beginning to build on right now!

And there is more to come.

By modeling this program city- and county-wide, we can deploy the same strategy for non-partisan, ballot-box power in other parts of our community too!



Building Relational Power

Candidate Accountability

SAYING “YES” TO OUR COMMUNITIES

Over 300 strong,

our assembly of members and neighbors secured the following commitments from Grand Rapids Mayoral, 3rd Ward City Commission, and Michigan State House candidates.

For GR

- Short and long term traffic calming plans
- Year-round youth programming in the 3rd Ward
- Better affordable housing contribution from the Fulmar project

State-level

- Support childcare scholarship increase of 11% in the coming year's budget
- Work to create a dedicated child care fund in the budget and seek revenue for it
- Strengthen English language learning and resettlement support for New Americans in Kent County



GR City candidates joined MI State House contenders at our 2024 Candidate Accountability Session

SUCCESS TARGET

2024:

add three new Member Organizations



Dominican Sisters
Grand Rapids, Michigan



CHRISTIAN SERVICES
Community Engagement Team



Montessori Cooperative



Thank you
for joining us!

"Our church joined TWM because it gave us power. It gave us a space to speak out. I am a real example. I came from Africa, but now I have co-chaired a Candidate Accountability Session!"

PR. BANZA MUKALAY,
RESTORATION COMMUNITY CHURCH

"Working with other institutions in our neighborhood has been a dream of mine. Because of our work with Together West Michigan, it's really happening!"

SHERYL LUTH,
FULLER AVE. CRC

"Being part of Together West Michigan has empowered Everbloom Montessori to gain access to critical spaces, build meaningful partnerships, and strengthen our advocacy for equitable early childhood education."

KATE ROBINSON
LEAD PARENT COORDINATOR, EVERBLOOM MONTESSORI

www.organizewmi.com

Nov 12, 2024 Over 120 Together West Michigan members gather for a press conference prior to "Three Towers" hearing at Grand Rapids City Commission.



6
local TV stories

4600
words written
by journalists

100K+
estimated online
audience reach

6
media outlets
covering action



...ON THIS TOPIC, ALONE. THAT'S **RELATIONAL POWER** IN ACTION.

RELATIONAL RESULTS: \$20M INCREASE TO INVESTMENT IN WOMEN, MINORITY, AND MICRO-LOCAL CONTRACTORS ON FULMAR THREE TOWERS PROJECT

We'll save you a seat.

Help us continue to build a power organization that can do more **with** more of our neighbors.

Join us in-person, become a Member Organization, or make a one-time or recurring donation to help support and expand our work.



(Scan the code to learn more or visit organizewmi.com.)

