

Rebranding Positions Human Services Agency as a Leader in the Sector

OLD NAME: Leake & Watts Services

NEW NAME: Rising Ground



Overview

This \$100 million agency, founded in New York City in 1831, faced pressure to remain relevant in a competitive environment, but their name and brand were hampering their ability to get referrals and attract donors. Red Rooster Group led the agency through a process of revitalizing its brand, including a name change to Rising Ground, a new visual identity, Mission, Vision, and organizational language, as well as a new website, and marketing materials. These changes helped elevate Rising Ground's leadership position in the sector and foster its growth. Rising Ground acquired another agency, boosting its revenue to \$140 million. As one of the largest social service agencies in the New York City area, Rising Ground is now well-positioned to support the next generation of New Yorkers.

Challenge

Leake & Watts had been struggling with its name for a long time. Since its founding in 1831, its mission had evolved from an orphanage to a full-service agency providing more than 40 programs to a range of populations. But that wasn't clear from the name. It sounded like a law firm, or plumbing or electrical company, and was difficult to spell.

As social service agencies in New York City consolidated and updated in order to remain relevant, a strong brand presence was critical in order to appeal to government funders and private donors. Yet, organizational inertia and fear of losing touch with its 186-year heritage had prevented a name change. Red Rooster Group was brought in to assess and address the situation.

Discovery

We conducted a thorough Discovery process that was designed to help us uncover brand perceptions and communication issues, assess brand equity, determine whether a name change was warranted, and gain insight for revitalizing their brand.

Discovery included:

- **A Brand Audit** that assessed all touchpoints with the public.
- **A Competitive Review** of other human services agencies to identify key differentiators.
- **25 Interviews** with leadership, Board members, and donors.
- **An Interactive Workshop** with two dozen senior leaders to explore brand strengths.
- **Five Focus Groups** with different departments to understand their brand challenges.

Insight

BRAND: What we heard was a family-like culture, respected leadership, and competent staff committed to helping people overcome their challenges. This insight would serve as the cornerstone of the brand — using the idea of “Rise” as the organization’s primary theme.

COMMUNICATIONS: There was a disconnect between the parent brand and program brands — each department has discrete audiences making marketing efforts difficult to coordinate. The lack of a consistent elevator pitch had everyone presenting the organization in their own way. This insight would be used to craft new Mission, Vision, and Boilerplate Statements for the organization, as well as new organizational Values and flexible Elevator Pitches.

WEBSITE: We also assessed the needs of their various audiences, and used that insight to develop a new website to inform potential clients and referral sources, and inspire donors to support the organization.

NAME: Poor name recognition outside the current referral base was hampering their ability to attract new donors. We developed a position paper describing the arguments for and against a name change with a recommendation that a change would help tell a more emotional story, be a more effective tool for fundraising, resonate better with younger audiences, connote a forward-thinking organization, and improve SEO and PR opportunities. We supported the Brand Committee in making the case to the Board. Skeptics were won over, and the Board voted to approve exploring a new name.

Naming Process

The leadership, Brand Committee, and Board were engaged in a thorough process to develop and test a new name that would meet their needs around the theme of "Rise."

CREATIVE BRIEF

We started with a Creative Brief that articulated the goals and criteria for the new name.

- Communicates our message [with a description of the message].
- Is appropriate to a wide range of service areas.
- Convey positive outcomes in a non-specific way since each population defines success differently.
- Is concise and memorable.
- Is distinctive and differentiates from the competition.
- Is easy to say and pronounce in English and Spanish.
- Is available for trademark registration and has an appropriate URL available.

ESTABLISHING COMFORT

We presented names in a series of rounds that allowed the Brand Committee and board members to become familiar with the naming process, learn about different kinds of names, and explore words that would best represent their organization. We generated more than 1,400 naming ideas, tested the perceptions of different names through surveys, and had legal vetting conducted to review for conflicts.

Through this process, the Committee recognized the need to move beyond names that were amended versions of Leake & Watts and make a break from their past. They also came to see how they could move past a merely descriptive name to one that was more evocative and inspiring, and would serve them well into the future.

EXPLORING DIRECTIONS

The first round of names was used to explore the kinds of names and words that the committee was comfortable with. After generating more than 500 names, we presented 125 names in 8 conceptual categories: Rise, Future, Renew, Direction, Strength, Support, Family, Together. The Committee selected the "Rise" direction and their feedback helped refine the criteria to include simple words that evoke warmth, and avoid seeming clinical, trendy, or religious.

GENERATING NAMES

We generated another 500 naming ideas based on the feedback and presented a short list. We also explored variations of the original name name such as Leake & Watts Lifelights, L&W Community Partners, L&W Family Focus, and LWNKY, as well as two names that incorporated the L and W to maintain connection to their brand: LifeWise and LifeWays.

ROUND 2 NAMES

Rise to Success	New Start New York	LifeWays
Opportunity Rising	Nurture NY	LifeWise
Change In Motion	Pivot	LifeBoost
	Elation	

The Committee recognized the value of the evocative naming approach that would set it apart in the nonprofit sector and position it alongside consumer brands. The Committee wanted the name to express its process and purpose in an action-oriented way while retaining some warmth, with a tagline that can tell more of the story.

EXPLORING DEEPER

In subsequent rounds, we generated additional names with taglines and available URLs.

ADDITIONAL NAMES

RISING THEME	COMBINED WORDS	COINED WORDS
Rising Ground	Boxkite	Arisent
Rise Hill	FutureUp	Attainity
RiseBridge	Forge the Future	Dryve
Risepoint	Heartbound	LyfeWorx
Riseway	Pridefinders	Navigo
Risewell	Lifeladder	OPENTunity
StarRise	LifePilot	Opportunus
ArcSpring	Lifeward	Positivity
LeapSpring	Life Vantage	Potentialize
GrowPath	Life Rising	Promentum
Skypath	LifeAgenda	Thryve
Springward	LifeCommand	Transformant
Tailwind	LifeOn	Tryumph
	Next Move	Upswing
	Soulshine	Youmanity

FIELD TESTING

We surveyed consumers who were unfamiliar with Leake & Watts to test how certain names were perceived. This provided the Committee with feedback about how well the names communicated different brand attributes so they could make an informed decision.

MOCK UPS

We also created mock-ups showing various names on a homepage, sign, and newspaper article, as well as in verbal communications so that Committee Members could evaluate their usage.

SELECTING A NAME

The Brand Committee selected the name **Rising Ground**, an original and available name that conveys how the organization helps people rise above adversity regardless of what they are facing. The tagline, "**Paths to positive change since 1831**" amplifies the message and connects to their history.

Red Rooster Group prepared a presentation summarizing the naming criteria, process, and field-testing feedback for the Brand Committee to present to the Board. A Board Member who was initially skeptical of changing the name presented on behalf of the Brand Committee, giving credence to their recommendation, which was accepted by the Board.

Messaging

The name was not changed in isolation. We led the Committee and Board through a process of updating the Mission and Vision Statements, Values, and other brand messaging so they better conveyed the agency's commitment and made it easier for staff, clients, and donors to understand what Rising Ground does, and be articulate brand ambassadors.

MISSION

Driven by the belief that each of us can thrive when life has hope and opportunity, Rising Ground provides caring support and proven paths to positive change, helping the most vulnerable children, adults and families rise above adversity.

VISION

Rising Ground envisions a future for New York where every child has an equal opportunity to succeed; where vulnerable individuals and families have the resources and support they need; where people with disabilities can access opportunity and fully participate in their communities; and where all are supported as they navigate life's challenges and positively direct their lives.

BOILERPLATE

Rising Ground is a leading nonprofit social service organization, providing the most vulnerable children, adults and families in the Greater New York City area, with the resources and skills needed to rise above adversity and positively direct their lives.

Visual Identity

We created a new visual identity that is expressive, contemporary, and evokes the agency's personality. The visual identity system consists of:

- **A Logo** with icon depicting earth and sun that can be read as a rising figure. The "trapped" circle figure in the original logo, was "released" with positive energy and motion. The icon was designed to work well in social media while the custom typography for the word mark gives a contemporary and distinctive voice to the organization.
- **Brand Architecture** that organizes more than 40 programs into four categories with icons and colors associated with each category.
- **Color System** with colors assigned to specific programs, website sections, and actions.
- **Typographic System** with guidelines for usage.
- **Icons** for use in print and online media.
- **Brochure System** for developing program brochures in-house.
- **Brand Style Guide** describing usage guidelines for all brand elements.
- **Brand Messaging** including Mission, Vision, Values, Boilerplate, and Elevator Pitch.
- **Editorial Guidelines** with grammar, language, and spelling preferences.

OLD	NEW NAME, LOGO & TAGLINE		SOCIAL MEDIA ICON	
				
BRAND ARCHITECTURE				
 <p>CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES</p>		 <p>EDUCATION & EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES</p>		 <p>INTELLECTUAL / DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES</p>
				 <p>HEALTH & WELLNESS</p>
ICONS				
  		   		
NEWSLETTER SECTION HEADERS				
				
				

BROCHURE SYSTEM



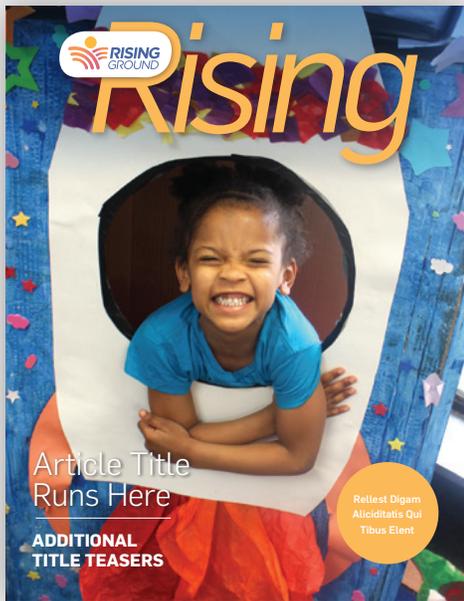
We developed a flexible template the allows their staff to easily create consistent looking program brochures.

POSTER



This poster for their various facilities keeps the new Mission and Vision top of mind for staff.

NEWSLETTER



We redesigned their newsletter to have more of a magazine feel to better represent the organization's leadership role in the sector.

Website

We planned, wrote, designed, and developed a completely new website for the organization.

We created a positive experience that showcases the agency's mission of helping people rise above adversity.

The four program categories are color coded throughout the site for easy navigation. There is also a drop down menu of all services for easy access.

The site features testimonials, success stories, impact statistics, a career section, and other features to engage audiences and motivate them to donate, volunteer, apply for a job, refer a client, or get help.

The website was developed in Wordpress. The client can edit all sections of the site.



Brand Launch

Announcing the new name was an opportunity to renew enthusiasm for the organization. To facilitate the transition and rollout, we drafted a Why We Changed Our Name document, letters to each stakeholder group, FAQs, posters with the new Mission and Vision, and other supporting materials. We produced a video that was used to announce the name to staff at launch events at their different locations. The events generated lots of excitement and the name was well received by staff and donors, and garnered some media coverage (handled by a PR firm).



Name announcement flyer for staff.

The new name was publicly announced on the steps of New York City Hall.

Outcomes

Rising Ground's new brand eliminates the confusion with their old name, inspires donors with an uplifting message, and gives staff a clear purpose to rally around. The organization now has a responsive website that engages clients, donors, and volunteers, and has the tools to manage its brand and communicate its message.

Most importantly, Rising Ground is positioned as a leader in the social services sector — one not known for bold changes. With several organizations in their field having rebranded by truncating their names in recent years, (such as Jewish Board of Family & Children's Services to Jewish Board, and Children's Aid Society to Children's Aid), Leake & Watts' transformation to Rising Ground has sent a signal to the sector that it is leading the way with bold decisions. They are seen as an attractive potential partner for acquiring other agencies, and their new brand is serving them well as in vying for attention and funding in these uncertain political times.

“ Howard and the entire team at Red Rooster Group truly went above and beyond with our project – the rebranding and renaming of a venerable 185+ year organization.

It wasn't easy! Red Rooster Group took the time to really listen to what we believe in and what we wanted to achieve. Their process was strategic, creative, and inventive from start to finish.

All throughout, Red Rooster Group made sure we stayed true to the core themes of our work that we collectively identified. No detail was too small and no request unsatisfied. You couldn't ask for a team more dedicated.

Today, we have a new name, visual identity, website, messaging, and mission and vision statements that are truly reflective of our impact in the community. Our new brand positions us with confidence as we look to the future and ways to further increase our impact. Red Rooster Group was a tremendous partner. We are delighted with the results of our work together!



Meredith Barber
Senior Director of Institutional Advancement
Rising Ground