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*A major provider of housing
and substance abuse
treatment in Chicago's
homeless services system*



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as StreetWise Vendor of the Year



A SAFE HAVEN FOUNDATION

Caption

A HEART FOR SERVICE, A MIND FOR BUSINESS

Suzanne Hanney
StreetWise Editor-in-Chief

Eddie “Muhammad” Hubbard looks back proudly on the journey that began when he came to A Safe Haven Foundation in 2007 as a parole violator in handcuffs.

Returning to the penitentiary multiple times was his only alternative during his decades of suffering from drug abuse, but Hubbard says he had always wanted treatment for his addictions so he could be seen as a productive member of society.

“A Safe Haven provided what I needed: to be set down where I couldn’t move, where I could get my thoughts together,” Hubbard said. After 90 days, when asked what he wanted to do, he said he wanted to stay another 90 days and to take more classes.

Hubbard was given a job as a monitor: to check that people entering the non-profit’s building removed their hats. He went on to front desk security and then case aide. A Vietnam vet-

eran, the 61-year-old former Army drill instructor ultimately through A Safe Haven education classes received the certification he needed and was promoted to case manager at A Safe Haven’s Veterans Suites in North Lawndale.

“As a recovering addict it helped me,” he said. “Instead of doing drugs, my fix was helping other individuals. The everlasting fact is that I showed something positive. I look back on my journey from hustling metal in a grocery cart to having my own vehicle, my own apartment, to being a productive member of society and I still think it’s a dream.”

Kilroy Bentley is also a case manager at A Safe Haven’s South Shore recovery house who came through its program after more than 25 years in and out of other programs for his addictions. He learned how to manage his life better through the 90-day program: the first 30 days stabilizing to figure out what he needed, the next 30 days getting necessary state identification and

paperwork and finally occupational training, all while simultaneously attending classes.

“I came here, it made a difference,” Bentley said. “It was more like love and family.”

Founded in 1994 by Brian Rowland and Neli Vazquez-Rowland, A Safe Haven has adapted and flourished in hard times to become one of Chicago’s largest providers of substance abuse treatment and housing for formerly homeless people. The couple’s background was not in social services but in finance, however. She was in wealth management after having been a stockbroker and he worked in index arbitrage at the Chicago Board of Trade, profiting from market inefficiencies.

Their reason for starting the non-profit and social enterprises was Brian’s own alcohol addiction, which showed them how few services there were — especially for people whose health benefits packages were less generous than his. In an effort to “Give Back” they purchased a 13-

unit apartment building in Logan Square; they personally subsidized rent and services for other people recovering from drug and alcohol addiction. Their plan was to sell the building after a year for a profit.

"But as we saw people come to us in crisis and get the services they needed, then moving out with a new lease on life, it would have been heartless to go through with the original plan," said Vazquez-Rowland, who is president of A Safe Haven.

Instead, she continued to work in financial services until 1998, a five-year period she likens to the "wild, wild West," because the state of Illinois lacked any model for a recovery home. A Safe Haven worked with the state to develop standards for professional licensing of staff, housing and services and became the first licensed recovery home in Illinois.

"You could say that we privately funded the pilot for what we were developing, what we call the 'social and economic development model,'" Vazquez-Rowland said. "Actually, our original mission statement was 'doing well by doing good.' Many people in social services thought they were mutually exclusive terms, but we argued that if you design your business structure properly, you can accomplish both."

Today, A Safe Haven has over 200 employees and a combined annual budget of \$16 million. Its 28 locations (eight of them purchased and renovated in the last 18 months) provide more than 500 units of transitional housing, 350 permanent supportive units and 500 units of affordable housing. Since the recession, A Safe Haven has bought abandoned buildings in Chicago neighborhoods such as South Shore, Englewood or North Lawndale that Vazquez-Rowland said other developers might shun. In 19 years, only two properties have been divested.

She is especially proud of A Safe Haven's new 120,000 square foot headquarters, located at 2750 W. Roosevelt Road, across the street from Douglas Park in North Lawndale. "I like to think of this building being an oasis in one of the most poverty-stricken neighborhoods," Vazquez-Rowland says. "It gleams, it shines."

"To further the cause on Sunday, July 14 we are hosting our 3rd annual 5k RUN! To End Homelessness held in Douglas Park, a Chicago gem with shady paths. It is exciting to see the 5k RUN/WALK grow and attract people from all over Chicagoland. We intentionally host it in the community to invite people to join us in our effort to transform a community from within. Our philosophy is to go the distance and be a catalyst for transformation; we must inspire and invest in lives, families and entire communities where they live."

The headquarters building has a major share of the transitional housing units and also operates one of the city's new overnight shelters for youth age 18-24. Other tenants include a Chicago Housing Authority voucher office and U.S. Veterans Administration service center, both tenants that bring resources to the populations A Safe Haven serves, she said. Sometime this quarter, it will open a Social Enterprise Zone nearby to serve as the office headquarters for the various related A

Safe Haven vertically integrated businesses used to employ residents and alumni and to house inventory, trucks and equipment.

"It takes more than a big heart to run a non-profit," Vazquez-Rowland says. "You've got to have a heart for service and a mind for business."

Talking to her and touring the facility, it becomes clear how much she loves this two-sided model they have created. She credits the formula to Loyola University, where she and Brian met and graduated. It's where she first learned about Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, which starts with shelter and ends with self-actualization. The non-profit views substance abuse as a disease rather than a moral deficiency; "housing is health care" that treats it, Vazquez-Rowland said.

"Everyone needs a roof over their heads, a warm bed to sleep in, three healthy nutritious meals a day, and a human connection: people they can talk to so they are not isolated or alone; support groups they can relate to that can relate to them."

"Since we started, over 46,000 people have participated in our programs;





A Safe Haven Culinary Institute Kitchen



Box Lunch Catering is a new social enterprise

the most exciting thing is to see the cycle of poverty broken for them and for the next generation for thousands of our alumni. Over the years we have seen that by getting to the root cause of the family dysfunction and/or financial challenges and by getting the parent the help they need to address and solve their problems, we see their children grow up in a drug-free environment and be raised by employed, responsible parent(s). The result is that they move on to become college-bound and normal productive citizens themselves."

Hubbard, for example, said that getting all his needs met – "food, a decent place to live, clothing, the whole nine yards" – kept him from relapsing until he got back on his feet.

Individuals are assessed when they come to A Safe Haven and offered a variety of programs ranging from drug treatment to education or job training. There is no "cookie-cutter approach" to homeless services.

"Nor is the homeless population homogenous --we see people from all walks of life benefit from our programs – homelessness and poverty and their causes vary and do not discriminate" Vazquez-Rowland said.

Those who complete the program, she said, "start to adopt a culture of appreciation, gratitude, to seek to make a difference. They teach to their children, they are active in the community. It all comes back. They never

forget they were homeless and their stories are very inspirational."

Simultaneously, the Rowlands have consistently applied business terms such as "double bottom line" and "return on investment." One of their first investments was a state-of-the-art tracking system similar to those used by for-profit companies that helps them "budget for results." It is not enough to cite numbers of individuals who have been through the program, Vazquez-Rowland said. They look for outcomes-- numbers of people who have completed drug treatment or job training that led to employment and housing.

"If you don't set goals and you don't measure your progress, then you don't achieve," she said of their business model. "We have certain benchmarks and we're quick to correct wasting money or wasting time. We're constantly evaluating, fine tuning and looking for ways to make it better."

Current Medicaid funding is inefficient at the human side of budgeting for results, however, because it pays for three to five days of detox every 30 days rather than wrap-around services that would provide a lasting path to change. "It's a vicious, vicious cycle that drains public resources over and over," she said.

At minimum Vazquez-Rowland would like to see Medicaid funding

for aftercare that includes residential care, treatment and case management. She argues that treatment and recovery management services lessen the demand for drugs, which in economic terms means the supply will also go away.

A Safe Haven's continuum of housing (from recovery house and transitional to those with supportive services as well as permanent affordable) came about because the couple saw landlords were reluctant to rent to people who had credit issues, prison time or short work histories. A second barrier was employers who were afraid to hire them.

As a result, A Safe Haven and its founders developed social enterprise businesses to create jobs and employ its graduates. These include affordable housing, a call center, box lunch catering, landscaping, pest control, and an internationally recognized nail polish line.

The new box lunch catering business, for example, was a natural, given that the headquarters building serves 1,200 meals a day. Since 2007, 60 residents annually had been receiving foodservice and culinary arts training, with city and state certification.

The landscaping business was acquired in 2009, when A Safe Haven was a white knight chosen by the board of the century-old Chicago Christian Industrial League to carry



A Safe Haven's Life Skills Class



Landscaping city thoroughfares is yet another business that employs alumni

on its mission. The business handles medians and holiday lights downtown and on Michigan Avenue as well as city hall's green roof, the 311 and 911 call centers, Police and Fire Department training academies, Starbucks coffee shops, McCormick Theological Center and many other public and commercial projects.

The landscaping business also works on A Safe Haven's own properties, including two former crack houses acquired in the last year. Vazquez-Rowland calls them former eyesores turned into productive assets, "the crown jewels of their communities."

"If you are living at A Safe Haven, there are no neon signs that you are any less of a person," Vazquez-Rowland said. "We take great pains so that any building we manage is the best-looking building on the block, so that if you are walking out in a suit, you really blend in."

Everything the organization does must be "world-class," she said, and its graduates must feel they have been through the Harvard or Yale of providers, in order to overcome the stigma of homelessness and substance abuse.

"We look at homelessness with a different lens," she said. "Our lens is seeing the possibility and potential, and we bring it out of them even if they don't see it themselves at first."

Started last year, the pest control

business is owned by Brian Rowland, who is a veteran. It uses a green thermal remediation process to kill bed bugs, cockroaches, spiders etc.

Be! Products for nails is yet another social enterprise that offers a product with high gloss, fast drying and durability. The nail lacquers will be included in the swag bags for the Feb. 8 MusiCares dinner honoring Bruce Springsteen during GRAMMYS® Awards week. The product is perfect for the event, Vazquez-Rowland said, because of drug and alcohol addiction among musicians and also Springsteen's own activism. His latest Wrecking Ball album focuses on social justice themes such as "we take care of our own."

In the four years since the recession, on the other hand, the state of Illinois has not taken care of its own. State funding has been cut in half even as demand for services and housing has skyrocketed, Vazquez-Rowland said.

"The economic recovery has not trickled down," she said. "In the community where we're headquartered, there's over a 30 percent unemployment rate. We're at a tipping point. With the fallout of the economy, combined with budget cuts for human services by all levels of government, we're seeing the highest rate of violence in the world

right here in Chicago." The statistic was brought home to her recently on a family vacation in Ireland when she saw a story about Chicago's murder rate in the local newspaper.

State and local government can no longer maintain social programs alone, yet corporate giving is fragmented. That's why A Safe Haven is launching its Link, Leverage, and Align™ campaign this quarter to streamline corporate responsibility, giving and impact. Its components include integrated corporate employee giving, volunteerism, sponsorship, pro bono work and possible board involvement as well as employee hiring, especially Veterans and purchasing of services such as landscaping, pest control, catering or the call center.

Vazquez-Rowland would meet with C-level executives to customize plans, which would be backed with data showing their dollar value and the impact they made on homelessness. The results could be used to boost corporate and employee engagement, morale or in annual reports to improve corporations' social responsibility ratings, she said.

"We are grateful to the corporate community for what they do now, but by intentionally designing a comprehensive 3-5 year strategy to 'Link, Leverage, and Align' we can definitely do more in an exponential manner," Vazquez-Rowland said.