

## A Safe Haven Foundation

In the early-1990s, [Neli Vazquez-Rowland](#) (BA '85) and her husband, Brian Rowland (BBA '89), were flourishing in the financial field. She was a successful financial advisor, managing portfolios for the wealthy. He did index arbitrage at the Chicago Board of Trade, profiting from market inefficiencies.

Then the bottom fell out.

Brian was addicted to alcohol. As he got sober and discovered the paucity of services for those in recovery, the couple began investing in real estate, buying abandoned Chicago apartment buildings during that era's economic downturn. They rehabbed a 13-unit building in Logan Square, and rented it for a year to people recovering from drug and alcohol addiction

The Logan Square project was so successful that the Rowlands established A Safe Haven Foundation in 1994 and developed a comprehensive program to serve those in recovery.

"It was a leap of faith to leave our established financial business, which was providing a very comfortable lifestyle for our family," recalls Neli. "It wasn't an easy decision. But treatment centers and hospitals were referring people to us in droves. We saw there was a glaring hole to fill: a safe place where people could work on their recovery."

For the first five years, the foundation received no public funds, and Neli continued work in the investment business to subsidize care for thousands. Their project eventually became the state's first licensed recovery home.

A Safe Haven now has 130 employees, an annual budget of \$16 million, and 500 apartments in 16 sites for permanent housing. In addition, there are 1,375 beds for temporary housing in a program that includes [supportive housing](#), meals, case management, drug and alcohol treatment, health care, [job training and placement](#), and access to affordable housing.

The housing serves homeless singles as well as single parents and their children, as A Safe Haven works to reunite families torn apart by addiction.

**In January, Neli was named "Chicagoan of the Year" by Chicago magazine.**

"It's the most rewarding work in the world," says Neli. She and Brian live in the western Chicago suburbs with their sons, Dylan, 16, and Devin, 20. "There's tremendous satisfaction in helping people finally break the cycle of homelessness, joblessness, incarceration, and addiction."