



Neli Vazquez Rowland
Co-Founder of A Safe Haven Foundation
Board Director, Billings Fellow, Institute of Medicine of Chicago

Neli Vazquez Rowland is an influential force in Chicago and a social entrepreneur, author, speaker, and subject matter expert on the topics of homelessness and the opioid epidemic in America. In 1994, Neli Vazquez Rowland and her husband Brian Rowland, a military veteran, left their successful, 13-year careers in finance to launch the Chicago nonprofit, elegant solution to end homelessness known as A Safe Haven Foundation. With investment from their own pockets, they formed an organization and are lauded today as the pioneering architects for one of the most innovative social service models in the world to help break the cycle of addiction, homelessness, incarceration, and unemployment.

Neli has become a fearless and passionate champion for America's most vulnerable population—the homeless. Her organization, A Safe Haven, has moved more than 130,000 people, from social and economic crisis to independent living and self-sufficiency with their pride and purpose restored. The innovative, comprehensive approach provides individualized, community-based, state-licensed food, shelter, substance abuse treatment, healthcare, education, job training, placement, and phased-housing programs, all administered under one umbrella organization. Their services include phased housing in more than 40, award-winning transitional, supportive, and affordable independent living facilities for veterans, single mothers, seniors, and individuals from the re-entry and recovery populations. They also place more than 1,000 people a year in jobs within A Safe Haven's social enterprise businesses—catering, landscaping, and staffing services.

Growing up as a first-generation Mexican American in Chicago's primarily Hispanic Little Village neighborhood, Neli witnessed firsthand how social and economic issues, as well as mental health and addiction problems, can rapidly spiral an individual or a family into homelessness. She was the first child in her family to graduate from college with a degree from Loyola University's School of Business and the Minority Executive Management program at Dartmouth's Tuck School of Business. She built a successful 13-year career as an investment banker and rose to the level of vice president at both Bear Stearns and Oppenheimer before joining Chicago-based MYS Development Corporation as president. There, she contributed to more than \$500M in construction projects over ten years for both the private and public sectors. Under Neli's leadership, MYS was named one of America's fastest-growing businesses by *Hispanic Magazine* and she served on the board of the Hispanic American Construction Industry Association.

###