

The Triple Bottom Line: Raising Money, Providing Individuals Support Services and Impacting the Socio-Economic Environment

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A Safe Haven Foundation Co-Founders: Neli Vazquez Rowland, President and Brian M. Rowland, Chief Executive Officer at the White House Champions of Change Award Ceremony.

Photo Credit: Courtesy of A Safe Haven Foundation.

...the most useful and influential people in [America] are those who take the deepest interest in institutions that exist for the purpose of making the world better.

Booker T. Washington

The advancing interest in social innovation has allowed for a clear definition of A Safe Haven Foundation's (ASHF) trailblazing social business enterprise, and proof of concept in our existing business strategies. Our efforts bring in impressive public and private funds while providing holistic, wrap-around services within a comprehensive behavioral health continuum of care and aftercare model that transforms lives immediately, for the long-term, and for future generations. The rhetoric coined around social business enterprise is a recent development in the last decade; when ASHF began in 1994, there was no specific terminology around our type of work, in addition to the fact that stigmas around homelessness and poverty kept us fairly isolated from public discussions. The emerging words and concepts, and the public's familiarity with the vocabulary today, serve as building blocks and have helped to increase our reputation as leaders in the world of social business enterprise in Chicagoland, and nationwide.

There are phrases that strive to define and conceptualize the process that happens when a business steps off of

the straight line on a flat page -- a money maker standing behind some ideas -- then jumps off of the page and into the world as a living, breathing role-model organization. With the organization continuing to make money while positively making an impact, changing the world, and innovating society as it turns every corner. As a business takes on such a life, it becomes a model citizen, aligning all aspects of its ideals and working as a force to maintain financial stability while impacting society. It goes by many names: Conscious Capitalism, Mission Driven Ventures, Social Enterprise Business, Public-Private Partnership, Corporate Social Responsibility, Impact Investing; while words strive to explain a vital concept, words alone do not have the power to change the world -- so what is this force that is changing the world? How can we define it so it can be a scalable model that more businesses can use to increase their value driven missions, or more nonprofits and for-profits can leverage to expand their bottom lines?



*Front Entrance, A Safe Haven Foundation Headquarters;
Located in Chicago's North Lawndale Neighborhood.
Photo courtesy of A Safe Haven Foundation.
Photo Credit: Courtesy of A Safe Haven Foundation.*

24 years ago, when my husband, Brian, and I co-founded A Safe Haven out of pocket, we started as a small organization looking to make a difference for those in crisis without the means to access supportive services. Today, ASHF continues to grow exponentially with each passing year; we are proud to have a proven track record of success for more than 100,000 formerly homeless individuals and we now maintain a \$20 million-dollar operating budget, with more than \$50 million in assets. Annually, nearly 5,000 clients are provided with housing and wrap-around support services to address the root causes to poverty and homelessness. For many reasons,

including its incredible cost-saving facet compared to alternative so-called 'solutions' to homelessness and poverty, addiction, and related issues, we believe ASHF's model is sustainable and scalable.

If the private and public sector combine the resources of our available time, talent, and treasure, together we can eradicate poverty and homelessness. ASHF has invested in aligning private donors, government contracts, commercial enterprises, and other stakeholders to address the social issues of poverty and homelessness. We are proud that our audience encompasses not only individuals seeking out services but a stream of donors, volunteers, political, and corporate leaders; as well as social activists and other dedicated stakeholders who are inspired by our mission and committed to helping us move our initiatives forward.

ASHF is a trailblazer in the field of social business enterprise, converging for profit business acumen with the prerogative to solve social issues. Our model provides an individualized turnkey approach, as we work to holistically break the cycle of poverty, homelessness, joblessness, incarceration, and addiction. I realized long ago that there needed to be a new approach to meet society's most pressing social needs -- one which combines the best attributes of the private sector with the passionate commitment of the social sector --- with the goal of achieving both a business and social mission. In my role as organization president, we adapted the social

enterprise business model, backed by knowledge-sharing and expertise in finance. Operating from a demand-driven mission, and through privately funded demand-driven growth, the model was created by integrating real-time services, measured by impact metrics, with performance-based marketing and growth solutions. Our approach to the provision of high performing human and social services is grounded in a combined 30-year corporate background in finance and wealth management.

I view our work as an essential product necessary not only to those utilizing our services directly, but for those supporters seeking to make a contribution to the social and financial health of society; and most importantly, the viability of our communities, city, state, nation and the world. It is no longer a question of whether corporate America should contribute to social causes alongside charitable individuals. Corporations must strategically navigate the "sea of goodwill" in order to reach their corporate citizenship goals, while generating the greatest return on their investment. Through A Safe Haven's vertically-integrated "ecosystem" model and transparent business approach, all of those we engage as partners can be assured their support is generating long-term sustainable impact in the lives of our countries' most vulnerable citizens.

Everything stays the same until thought leaders, social entrepreneurs, social activists, champions, and the like take very specific, focused proper action to change the

direction of the current status quo. It's like Newton's Law of Inertia in the world of physics, explaining that *"an object at rest stays at rest and an object in motion stays in motion with the same speed and in the same direction unless acted upon by an unbalanced force."* When my husband and I were in crisis, dealing with addiction in our family, we received ample treatment to help our family to recover and turn our lives around, but we worried about those without access to quality care who generally remained addicted, homeless, and tied up with the criminal justice system; whose children often end up in the foster care system, with future generations continuing to bear the burden of these crises. As fellow humans we were deeply concerned, and as a wealth management team we clearly saw that where there was no investment there would be no return on investment for people in crisis who had no access to support services. We took the first steps to form a focused and intensive social action business initiative to disrupt the inertia within an unjust fragmented system, and that first step turned into a world-class model.

Homelessness and poverty are so deeply entrenched in the systemic inner-workings of our society that a collective societal effort is necessary to truly impart a sustainable social impact not only in the city of Chicago, but across our nation as a whole. In that regard, we at ASHF have made it part of our mission to catalyze a paradigm shift by creating a unique approach that

successfully provides individuals in crisis with the tools to achieve self-sufficiency while also championing a distinctive business and marketing model that allows us to simultaneously implicate multi-level donors, supporters and consumers. The social business enterprise concept gives entrepreneurs the ability to build social impact and financial sustainability into the organization's DNA from its outset and enables a company to integrate social impact into business operations and prioritize social goals alongside financial returns.

ASHF has story upon story reflecting the joy and fulfillment of leading a social business enterprise. I think we can all agree that building income, in and of itself, does not hold the power to buy happiness. Research studying the complex relationship between happiness and income find varying results; for example, several recent studies published by The American Psychological Association suggest that varying income levels indicate how you attain happiness rather than if you attain it. Is it possible that a solid road to happiness lies in a marriage between building income and using that money to make the world a better place? Social business enterprises -- organizations that solve a social problem through a market driven approach, achieve that balance. They gain profit -- often impressive amounts, which is used for sustained impact upon society. We hear it commonly referred to as the triple bottom line -- money, people, and the greater environment -- in the case of ASHF, our private-public-

partnership businesses bring substantial revenue and fund our ground-breaking social mission work that we believe is sustainable and scalable. We absolutely encourage any interested business, nonprofit, or other types of organizations to join us, support us, partner with us, as we individually and collectively strengthen our resolve and commitment to pursue this road that pays great dividends, both financially and socially, to all stakeholders involved.