Brion Brooks

Hill Street Neighborhood - Mt. Morris, Illinois
A Supportive Housing Institute Success Story



Brion Brooks is the retired Executive Director of The Village of Progress, an Oregon, Illinois-based nonprofit that provides supportive services including educational sessions, vocational opportunities, and recreational activities to adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Ogle County. A former attorney-turned-pastor, Brion joined the Illinois Supportive Housing Institute inspired to create a form of supportive housing he first saw while in seminary. The result is Hill Street Neighborhood, a development Brion created and cosponsored with his friend and Institute teammate Jeff Stauter of Kreider Services, another service provider that supports hundreds of individuals and families across Northern Illinois. Currently under construction in Mt. Morris, a Northern Illinois Village located approximately 50 miles from the Wisconsin border, the completed Hill Street Neighborhood will feature 24 apartments in 12 one-story duplexes. Half of the apartments will offer supportive housing for residents with intellectual and developmental disabilities, while the other half will be available to income-eligible households with or without disabilities.



"When I started at the Supportive Housing Institute, I had a dream to create integrated housing where people with intellectual and developmental disabilities live side by side with other community members. I was introduced to the concept in seminary, when my seminary opened an apartment building where seminarians roomed with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The requirement of the seminarians was to simply be a friend to their roommates — listening to their concerns and encouraging them as they further explored their world.

"I thought this model would be infinitely better than group housing, which often separates or distances people with disabilities from the rest of the community. But I did not know how to make my dream come true until the Institute guided and supported me.

"In a handful of classes, the Institute taught me the basics of how to develop and apply for funding for supportive housing so I could take my idea to the next level. By the time Jeff and I graduated, we had a honed vision for what we wanted to accomplish, and we knew how to write a housing proposal that later earned funding to help us bring our project to life.

"Now, whenever I walk past our project under construction, I think of how these future homes could change others' minds about what housing for people with disabilities should look like. And I realize, the Institute has given me much more than the ability to make my dream reality. It's given me the tools I need to make greater change possible.

"The Institute taught me that while there are many obstacles to overcome when developing supportive housing, patience, humility, and asking for help are great assets to have. The Institute's instructors and presenters were always patient, willing to explain points that at first seemed vague, and willing to listen. There's a line in a Harry Potter book where the headmaster at Hogwarts tells the young student that 'help will always be given at Hogwarts to those who ask for it.' So it might be said of the Institute and supportive housing endeavors in Illinois!"

The Illinois Supportive Housing Institute is a capacity-building program jointly offered by the Corporation for Supportive Housing and the Illinois Housing Development Authority to equip organizations with the tools, knowledge, and partnerships needed to develop and manage supportive housing.

Ready to make a difference in your community? Learn more at insights.csh.org/il-institute-interest.