Rick Guzman

Las Rosas - Aurora, Illinois
A Supportive Housing Institute Success Story



Rick Guzman is the Executive Director of The Neighbor Project (TNP), an Aurora, Illinois-based nonprofit that offers a wide range of housing counseling services and an innovative Breakthrough Rental program to help local renters start their journey on the path to homeownership. Before joining the Illinois Supportive Housing Institute, Rick had extensive experience leading his nonprofit's work to acquire and rehabilitate existing multifamily housing to rent out at affordable rates – but he wanted to do more to help his community's most vulnerable. So did the leaders of two other local nonprofits Rick often worked with: The Association for Individual Development (AID), which provides supportive housing and services for people with developmental disabilities and behavioral health challenges; and Hesed House, which offers emergency shelter and supportive housing for people experiencing homelessness.

The trio decided to elevate their partnership by joining the Illinois Supportive Housing Institute and embarking on a new adventure: creating and operating their first supportive housing development together. Their development, Las Rosas, marks The Neighbor Project's first supportive housing joint venture. Currently being redeveloped in the former St. Paul Lutheran School in Aurora, the completed Las Rosas will offer 20 units of supportive housing for people with intellectual or developmental disabilities, mental health challenges, and people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.



"The partnership between TNP, AID, and Hesed House began with the personal relationships between the three CEOs/Executive Directors. So there was a strong foundation of trust between the partners — however, before the Supportive Housing Institute, we hadn't had a professional context to grow the technical elements of developing a specific housing partnership together. The Institute provided a safe, encouraging environment to begin building that partnership.

"I think the main challenge that we had was around the timing of the [funding] application and not quite having the right site in time for the funding round that was open immediately following our Institute 'graduation.' But going through the Institute together really helped to solidify our determination to submit a joint supportive housing proposal, so we met monthly for a year following the completion of the program and then submitted our application roughly 12 months later. Elements of our meetings felt like a continuation of the Institute as we channeled the problem-solving and team-building skills we honed during the program into overcoming the challenges that come up when planning and developing supportive housing.

"Even if other not-for-profits don't go through the Institute with a specific joint-venture partner in mind (like we did), the Institute helps demystify the funding and application process and introduces participants to other future or potential partners."

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.