



Meet Your NAHC Board Members

Arturo Bendixen might have "happily retired", as he puts it, in 2017, but there's no rest for the weary when it comes to advocacy for the homeless and particularly those living with HIV/AIDS. His professional resume was the homework for what he now continues, as a NAHC Board member. For over two decades Art, as he's better known, served in leadership positions at Interfaith House (since re-named The Boulevard) and at the AIDS Foundation of Chicago (AFC), with the focus on housing services.

"I have a degree in social work. During my nine years at Interfaith House, I worked very closely with hundreds of men and women every year who were experiencing homelessness and who were also living with chronic health conditions," Art explains. "I would share meals with them at our Respite Center at least half a dozen times per week. I learned a great deal...not only about their housing and health challenges, but especially about their resiliency and ability to hope amid so many struggles in their lives. "

It was some of those examples in courage that sustained him through his work, often grueling. Inspiration was found in progressive movements and concepts such as "Housing First," "Harm Reduction" and "Trauma-informed Interventions.

"Those," he maintains, "taught me to accept the realities of those we served. It fostered respect for the sacred dignity of each person and family."

It also fostered a wry anecdote: "I'm Latino, but was often not recognized as one, with my blue eyes and then-blond hair. And because I am fluent in Spanish, I welcomed working within the Latin community." He pauses. "I occasionally enjoyed eavesdropping on conversations in Spanish, especially when they were about me!"

An especially-proud chapter in his stewardship of the AFC was a Chicago Housing for Health Partnership (CHHP) Research Study with the adult homeless population.

"From 2004 to 2009, this random-control trial, which was published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), helped to influence local and national policies about the cost benefits of housing those with chronic health conditions," Art explains.

"If we are going to get better health outcomes in the U.S. and lower soaring health care costs, we've got to pay attention to the social determinants of health...and housing is key. I am an apologetic and shameless promoter for housing for the healthcare sector," Art states. "My objective is to continue to bring key players together, support strategic planning and research efforts...and tell the stories I have played a role in."

