MEET JOSÉ A. RICO
Director Of TRHT Greater Chicago

Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT) Greater Chicago, is proud to announce their first-ever director, José A. Rico, a community leader and educator dedicated to working for justice and racial equity in Chicago.

For the last three decades, José A. Rico has worked in Chicago schools and community-based organizations, as well as on a national level leading development of educational policy in the White House under President Obama, and currently serves at the Chief Partnership Officer for United Way of Metro Chicago - all to make sure the basic needs of the most vulnerable are being met and to defend human dignity.

ABOUT JOSÉ A. RICO
Born in the small mountain town of Jeruco, México, Rico immigrated to the United States as a child and he and his family made Chicago their home.

While pursuing a degree in mechanical engineering at the University of Illinois– Urbana, and six months into an internship for Amoco, Rico had an awakening while walking home from the el one night. He realized what he really wanted to do was dedicate his life, “...so that not just the people in my community, but people across the city, could live a life of dignity here.”

So he walked away from engineering and took a job as a science teacher at Chicago’s Latino Youth Alternative High School, where he taught for the next three years.

Rico continued his work in youth development and community service, serving as the program manager for Public Allies, a Chicago nonprofit, then went to work for the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, working with parents around the state to ensure that families were not targeted by INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service).

Two years later, he was hired by UIC (University of Illinois at Chicago) to develop small, innovative learning communities in public schools, while working as a school improvement coach and completing a master’s degree in curriculum instruction, and a second master’s, in Educational Leadership.

“We’re really at a crossroads of whether the city is going to tackle the inequities that have been part of our city for so long.”
- José A. Rico

“I am a Chicagoan by way of Mexico. Raised on the southwest side, I was blessed to receive support from family, neighbors and teachers along my journey. Those relationships fueled a deep commitment, and passion that compels me still - to seek out and uplift others amongst my community I hold so dear. This is why I serve.”
- José A. Rico
When the Multicultural Arts School, a Chicago Public School serving the families in Little Village and North Lawndale with a focus on social justice and arts integration, opened its doors in 2005, Rico became the founding high school principal.

“When we look at everything that we want for our families, whether we want good schools, whether we want to be able to be in a healthy community, we have to address the issue of the racial inequity that persists. And we need to be able to be truthful about that.”
– José A. Rico

Then in 2009, Rico was appointed by President Obama to serve in the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics. During his tenure as Executive Director he helped reduce high school dropout rates and increased Latino college graduation rates through implementation of new initiatives, policies, and national public awareness campaigns. 

After returning to Chicago in 2014, Rico began working for United Way of Metro Chicago, where he has directed the investment of over $100M to provide human services and increase the leadership capacity of community based organizations, improving the lives of individuals and entire neighborhoods.

As he begins this position as Director of TRHT Greater Chicago, Rico will continue in his current role as Chief Partnership and Initiatives Officer with United Way of Metro Chicago. This unique partnership will allow him to do even more for this city he calls home - this place he’s committed his life to making more equitable and just for all its citizens.

ABOUT TRHT GREATER CHICAGO

Dedicated to promoting healing, increasing racial equity, and fueling transformation in neighborhoods and communities across Cook County, TRHT Greater Chicago is part of a comprehensive, national and community-based process supported by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) to “unearth and jettison the deeply held, and often unconscious, beliefs created by racism.”

Since June 2017, Woods Fund Chicago has been serving as the administering and lead organization for TRHT Greater Chicago, in partnership with Field Foundation of Illinois, Metropolitan Family Services, and the Chicago Community Trust. Its efforts include hosting citywide events, including celebrations of the National Day of Racial Healing through storytelling, training 66 members on the racial equity impact assessment (REIA) tool and preparing 22 individuals to become racial healing practitioners. TRHT Greater Chicago will draw on the work from the planning phase to begin bringing to life ideas and strategies to transform Cook County, including things like building a racial equity agenda, launching community-led grantmaking, learning from those who are doing work to advance racial equity, facilitating racial healing circles, and more. 

To learn more about TRHT Greater Chicago and how you can be involved, visit http://bit.do/trhtchicago