

HSP Success Stories

Community Residences finds a CEO to lead it into the future, thanks to a nationwide search led by HealthSearch Partners

The search: Chief Executive Officer

The organization: Community Residences (CRi), Chantilly, VA

Primary organization contact: Andrew Schneider, Chair, Executive Search Committee

Candidate selected: Justin Zakia

Challenge

Since its founding in 1975, CRi has been transforming how at-risk youth and people with developmental disabilities or mental health needs live, work and play. The CEO who led the organization's efforts for the past eight years notified the board in 2022 of his intention to retire. Faced with changing community needs and growing demand for its services, the CRi board realized it needed a strategic approach to recruiting a new CEO.

Andrew Schneider, chair of the board's CEO Search Committee, said the board went through an intentional process of choosing an executive search partner. "We had about a year's notice from the CEO of his pending retirement, so we had time to think about what we wanted in our next CEO and what we wanted in our next search firm partner," he explained.

After reviewing 11 responses to an RFP for an executive search partner, the CEO Search Committee narrowed the field to four finalists. Following in person meetings with the four, Schneider says it was apparent the only firm they felt comfortable with and whom they felt understood what they were looking for in a CEO was HealthSearch Partners (HSP). "Because we were not familiar with HSP prior to the CEO search, we were relatively surprised we chose them. They were from Texas, and we are in Virginia. They were primarily known for healthcare executive search, not conducting searches for organizations like CRi, But the trust and connection we felt with Ivan and Laura from the first time we met with them in person convinced us HSP was the right choice."

Solution

Schneider explained the CEO Search Committee wanted to work with the same consultant on a regular basis. "We knew we wanted a firm that could help guide us through the process because we were all busy individuals. We also needed a search partner who would be on top of things administratively so we could focus on selecting the right candidate. Finally, we wanted someone we felt comfortable with, someone who wouldn't tell us only what we wanted to hear and who would be a good advocate for the candidates as well," he said.

Directed by the CEO Search Committee, the process took nearly nine months to complete. Over that time, HSP conducted in-depth surveys of board members, leadership and staff.



Community Residences (CRi) is based in Chantilly, VA and serves communities in northern Virginia and Maryland. CRi offers residential and community (for those living in their own home) support to adults, youth, children and families with mental and/or intellectual disabilities, and those who are homeless. CRi's efforts are designed to provide individuals with opportunities to live as independently, and with as high a quality of life, as possible.

HSP Success Stories/Continued

Based on those interviews they focused on matching the fit of the candidates to CRI's mission and vision. During the former CEO's tenure, CRI had grown its outreach and services. With his departure, the search committee prioritized finding candidates who could help the organization look at things in a new light, candidates who would continue to grow the organization and possibly help them double in size and advocate for the organization's future from an updated perspective.

"Ivan and HSP were able to hear our selection criteria and balance those desires with where we were as an organization and our strengths as a board and staff. Ivan picked up that nuance immediately," Schneider said. "When we finally selected Justin (Zakia), we felt we had found someone who fit all of the parameters we had outlined to Ivan, Laura and HSP," Schneider said. "He was not someone that had been on our radar previously, but we knew he was going to be able to push the board and staff to think about things differently."

Results

For Justin Zakia, the old adage of "it's who you know" proved to be true. Zakia had a friend who served on the CRI board. That friend encouraged Zakia to apply for the CEO position and introduced him to the HSP team.

"I had worked with search firms in the past, and they were all pretty similar to each other," Zakia explained. "HealthSearch Partners was unusual in several ways. They provided more direction to the process, and it was more customized. The questions they asked me were thoughtful and not the standard throw-away questions. After joining CRI, I realized HSP's process was very thorough and that matched CRI's approach. I appreciated being kept informed of next steps and the timeline. HSP followed through on their commitments to me and they provided good feedback every step of the way. Overall, I felt HSP was engaged in my success throughout the process which was reassuring. I definitely felt that in HSP's eyes, and in CRI's eyes, and in my eyes, we achieved that ideal fit."

Schneider said CRI and the Search Committee were extremely satisfied with the search experience. "We appreciated HSP's ability to manage the timeline and communications with candidates. Their ability to set clear expectations for us as the Search Committee, made it much easier for us. We were also very satisfied with the caliber of candidates with whom we met. Obviously, we are very satisfied and happy with the candidate we selected – Justin."

Schneider explained he is asked several times a month by colleagues and others who he would recommend for executive search. "I have no problem recommending HSP. To me, the best way to demonstrate the great relationship we had with HSP is by referring them and recommending them to others. That is something I have zero hesitation doing for HSP, Ivan, and the entire team.

"Justin is doing very well. All the things we anticipated were going to be growth challenges for him and for CRI have come true and Ivan did a great job of preparing us for those."



Successful Searches, Satisfied Clients

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Justin Zakia, CEO, CRI