

IFC Shelter Crime: The Facts

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The Inter-Faith Council (IFC) is proposing to relocate its men's homeless shelter to the corner of MLK Blvd, and Homestead Rd, a location that it describes as "perfect". Neighboring citizens, however, almost all of whom support the concept of homeless shelters and many of whom have contributed money and/or time to IFC, have raised legitimate concerns, a common thread of which is the likely impact on the quality of the neighborhood, particularly on safety and security. IFC's claim that "homeless aren't any more likely to abuse drugs, suffer mental illness or perpetrate crime than the general population" (CHN, 11/25/09), contradicts statistics at the national, state, and county level. The recent Orange County Homeless Point-in-Time Counts (1/27/10), puts percentages of seriously mentally ill and diagnosable substance use disorder at 16% and 28% respectively, for adults in emergency shelters (previous criminal activity was not reported); the percentages for those in transitional shelters are higher.

Several staff or volunteers at Community House, where the men's shelter is currently located, have testified that they never felt unsafe there, but that has not been the case for everyone. At the time I became aware of IFC's plan to relocate the homeless shelter last year, I was a volunteer serving on IFC's Program Committee and spending one afternoon a week as a client interviewer at the IFC facility for Community Services, commonly referred to as The Pantry. Part of that duty entailed being aware of its "ban list", persons who were not admitted because infractions at one or more of the IFC locations (Pantry, Community House, HomeStart). Subsequent to learning of IFC's plans to move the shelter, I checked the ban list to see what number of infractions were designated to have occurred at Community House (which houses the community kitchen as well as the men's homeless shelter), and was astonished at what I found.

In a letter published in the *Chapel Hill News* (11/29/09) I simply noted that a number of the incidents referenced on the ban list were for assault, threatened assault, or fighting, and I appealed to the executive director of IFC to reveal detailed records, with names redacted. Since IFC has not come forward I will be more specific. The ban list covered a five year period, from 2005 on, and, to my count, cited 26 individuals for threatened or actual assault, or fighting, directed at staff, volunteers, police, or other guests. **On average, an incident involving threatened/actual assault or fighting occurred about every 10 weeks at the Community House.**

IFC has recently responded to police reports of shelter arrests (see "IFC Clients Arrest Data: January-October 2009" at IFC's "March on Poverty" blog). Chart 1

on the site indicates that 21 homeless arrests during that period were IFC residents (i.e., stayed at the shelter the night before being arrested). **On average, arrest of an IFC resident occurred about every two weeks.**

The proposed shelter site should not be considered an acceptable location.