



## IFC Community House Good Neighbor Plan - Proposed Updates

**Inter-Faith Council for Social Service (IFC) proposes updated Good Neighbor Plan (GNP) policies for its Community House residential facility that will enable Orange County to better achieve its stated goals of preventing and ending homelessness. Updates, rationale, and relevant information are presented below.**

Note: We use gender-neutral pronouns (e.g. they, their) throughout this document.

### **Proposed updates**

- A. The GNP refers to “homeless people” or “homeless persons.” The proposed update would change this terminology to “people experiencing homelessness.”

#### Rationale

People are not defined by their housing situation. A person’s current homelessness is a temporary lack of housing, not their identity.

- B. IFC Community House is designated as a Transitional Housing program. The proposed update would change this designation to an Emergency Shelter program.

#### Rationale

- Emergency Shelter has been identified as a community need by the [Orange County Partnership to End Homelessness Gaps Analysis](#).
- [Research](#) shows that:
  - Due to high entry barriers, transitional housing does not adequately serve some of our neighbors experiencing homelessness, whereas Emergency Shelter serves community members with a wider variety of needs and brings more people inside and off the streets of our neighborhoods.
  - Transitional Housing is not cost-effective. Housing-focused Emergency Shelter moves people out of the institution and into their own housing as quickly as possible, wrapping existing community services around the individual in their own home. People thrive more quickly and fully when they are in stable housing, not an institution.
  - Moving through a Transitional Housing model is not necessary or appropriate for each person experiencing homelessness. Community House provides more successful support when it focuses on individual needs rather than requiring every resident to progress through a one-size-fits-all, three-stage structure. IFC can better and more quickly help residents move to stable housing by tailoring services to support each individual’s strengths and needs.
- IFC operates the only shelters in Orange County and has an obligation to serve people regardless of the circumstances by which they find themselves homeless. IFC doesn’t believe the community should say to them, “This is not the place for you.”

### Practical Considerations

- The update to our program is not expected to bring more men experiencing homelessness to the area, as Community House will still have the same number of beds and will still assign each person to a bed that they will keep for their entire stay, i.e. the population will not change nightly. Because Community House would be able to serve a wider variety of community members more effectively, IFC could stabilize people more quickly in housing and then bring others inside who would otherwise be sleeping outside, thereby reducing the chances that people will be forced into area parks and neighborhoods.
- People who do not live at Community House will still not be permitted to visit or spend time at Community House during the day.

- C. Regular bed spaces are labelled “Transitional Housing” and the nightly cots used during cold weather and other special circumstances are labelled “Emergency Shelter.” The proposed update would bring our labels more in line with the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definitions and would more accurately describe our regular bed spaces as “Emergency Shelter” and our nightly cots as “Overflow Cots.”

#### Rationale

“Transitional Housing” does not accurately describe Community House because the program does not charge residents rent nor does it include a treatment or on-site services component. Community House is more typical of an Emergency Shelter because it provides shelter for individuals experiencing homelessness regardless of treatment needs, connects them to individualized community resources, and helps them find housing.

- D. Community House’s 17 cots may only be utilized under the following circumstances:

- Temperatures are below 40 degrees or there is an excessive heat warning/advisory;
- During and in the aftermath of snowfalls, thunderstorms, tornadoes, ice storms, hurricanes and community emergencies;
- When requested by law enforcement officers and/or Emergency Management Personnel; and
- When health conditions of the individual necessitate emergency shelter.

The proposed update would still require that the 17 cots be used for short-term, emergency circumstances, but may include additional situations when stop-gap shelter would benefit the individual and the community. Such situations may include when an individual has identified a family member to live with in another town, but needs shelter for the night until they can leave town the next day, or if a neighbor identifies someone in need of getting off the street while other arrangements can be made.

- E. The GNP requires that overflow cots in Community House be set up on the first floor. The proposed update would allow cots on the second floor if the first floor conference room is not available, though it would not increase the number of cots.

#### Rationale

IFC is not able to host community meetings, since cots are set up in the only conference room. We would like to make best use of the space we have available and accommodate community requests by having flexibility around where the 17 cots are located in the buildings.

### Practical Considerations

Overall occupancy limits would not change; using cots on the second floor would be *instead of* the first floor, not *in addition to* the first floor. The Chapel Hill Fire Department has indicated that cots moved to certain areas of the second floor would be in compliance with the fire code.

- F. Residential applicants are required to call Community House to inquire if a bed is available and to schedule an intake interview. The updated policy would allow people to come directly to Community House without having to call in advance.

### Rationale

- Many people experiencing homelessness do not have ready access to a phone, which could result in them having to spend one or more nights sleeping in a dangerous or unhealthy situation, sometimes outside.
- Requiring people in crisis to call before arriving at Community House creates an additional barrier to obtaining urgently needed, safe shelter.

### Practical Considerations

- IFC would still encourage people experiencing homelessness to call ahead to inquire about bed availability. When beds or cots are not available, Community House staff will do as much as possible to assist individuals to find suitable alternative shelter - both within Orange County as well as in nearby communities.
- Orange County will soon have a Coordinated Entry system whereby shelters will be accessed through a hotline and/or through designated homeless service providers. The new system will provide multiple options for accessing shelter to better accommodate people in crisis.
- People for whom no bed is available are not permitted to remain at Community House, and neighbors with concerns about specific situations are encouraged to call Community House at any time during the day or night.

- G. The GNP requires that Community House staff transport guests who are using overnight cots to and from the facility. IFC proposes that guests be able to access the facility through all available forms of transportation including their own cars, friends or family, or the public transit system.

### Rationale

- Requiring people in crisis to be picked up at a specific time and place in order to stay overnight at Community House creates an additional barrier and delay in obtaining urgently needed, safe shelter.
- People needing shelter may have jobs requiring them to work late night or early morning hours that do not coincide with the times IFC staff is available to provide transportation.
- Requiring staff to transport overnight guests puts a significant strain on IFC's limited staff and prevents them from providing adequate staffing for the facility and other needed support to residents.

- H. A full assessment is required before a person may be assigned a bed at Community House. The proposed update would split the assessment into two parts:

- Part 1 would occur at intake and include only information pertinent to admission including sex offender registry search, verification of homelessness, and demographic information.

- Part 2 would occur following intake and include gathering case management information about legal, health, housing, income, and other needs.

Rationale

- Only a few qualified staff members can process intakes that include full assessments, which creates a bottleneck and may cause delays in admission. The proposed change of separating intakes from assessments would allow all staff to conduct intakes.
- Case managers are able to perform a more complete and accurate assessment of a resident's strengths, resources and needs when they are not under the time pressure of initial intake.

- I. A full NC criminal background check is required before an applicant is assigned a bed at Community House. The updated policy would no longer require a full NC criminal background check before an applicant receives shelter. IFC staff would perform a sex offender registry check but would only complete a full criminal background check if it is needed for housing or employment purposes.

Rationale

- IFC cannot make services contingent upon criminal background checks, as people with criminal backgrounds have a significantly harder time finding housing and employment, thereby increasing the likelihood they will experience homelessness.
- Requiring a criminal background check creates an unnecessary barrier to accessing shelter and prevents some individuals from seeking services.

Practical Considerations

- No persons on the sex offender registry will be allowed to stay at Community House.
- All Community House residents will continue to be required to exhibit safe behavior at all times; if this is violated, staff will call law enforcement.

- J. People seeking a bed at Community House are required to possess a government-issued photo ID before accessing shelter. The updated policy would no longer require that people possess a government-issued photo ID prior to admission. Those without such ID would be assisted by IFC staff to obtain ID as soon as possible after admission.

Rationale

People experiencing homelessness often lose their identification for a variety of reasons including instability and theft. It can take several days or weeks to obtain new ID, and this is a formidable barrier to obtaining shelter that can have dire consequences for individuals.

Practical Considerations

- Staff will immediately work with the individual to obtain a photo ID, which residents will also need to qualify for housing.
- To mitigate the possibility that individuals listed on the sex offender registry evade identification, staff will ask all applicants without photo ID for other forms of identification.
- If a person is found to be on the sex offender registry, they will no longer be permitted to stay at Community House and staff will work with them to find alternate shelter.

- K. Community House residents are prohibited from possessing or using alcohol or drugs on or off the premises. The proposed update would still prohibit possession or use of drugs or alcohol on the premises,

but insobriety would not be a reason for automatic discharge. Appropriate, safe behavior will continue to be required of all residents at all times.

Rationale

- Discharging anyone from shelter for insobriety increases the number of people who struggle with addiction living on the streets and contributes to a delay in their ability to access recovery services.
- Sobriety is not a precondition for achieving and maintaining stable housing and employment for people experiencing homelessness, nor for people who are housed.

Practical Considerations

- IFC staff will continue to link Community House residents with treatment and recovery programs.
- Inappropriate and unsafe behavior, regardless of sobriety, will continue to be prohibited, and staff will call area crisis lines or law enforcement if such situations arise.
- Unacceptable behavior may lead to discharge. However, residents who are violent or disruptive would not be asked to leave at night without assistance from the crisis unit, EMT, or law enforcement.

- L. The current GNP requires all visitors to sign in. The proposed update would not require visitors to sign in.

Rationale

This is a redundant step, as the front door is locked and a staff person or volunteer has to open the door in order for someone to enter. Community House staff are aware of anyone who enters the building.

- M. The GNP includes many internal Community House documents such as the Community Standards Contract and Safety Plan, as well as lists of consequences for rule infractions. The proposed update will *refer* to internal documents but not *include* internal documents.

Rationale

Internal documents change as internal policies and procedures change to meet our needs, and it is not feasible to change the GNP every time an internal policy or procedure changes. It is not realistic or accurate for the GNP to name internal policies and procedures as static.

- N. The GNP requires that guests on cots stay the entire night at Community House. The proposed update would allow for guests to leave for reasons such as jobs, family emergencies, medical emergencies, etc.

Rationale

People who have chosen to sleep on a cot for the night do not want to be without shelter, so would typically only leave for a valid reason. It is rare that a person leaves shelter during the night without a valid reason.

Practical Considerations

Guests who choose to leave Community House without notifying staff of a valid reason will not be eligible for shelter for a number of days determined appropriate by staff.

- O. The GNP states that residents will remain in the facility from 8 p.m. to 7 a.m. The proposed update would allow Community House staff and residents to determine together appropriate hours.

Rationale

Hours need to be determined by staff and residents in order to take into account bus schedules, work schedules, exercise schedules, family obligations, etc.

Practical Considerations

Guests who repeatedly leave Community House outside of agreed upon hours without notifying staff of a valid reason will be asked to leave and become ineligible for shelter for a number of days determined appropriate by staff.

- P. Several sections of the GNP refer to residents as loitering. The proposed update would remove references to residents as loitering.

Rationale

Just as people who are housed would not be considered loitering at their place of residence, Community House residents should not be considered loitering at their place of residence.

Practical Considerations

Residents will not be allowed to be outside the building after curfew and before morning hours without staff permission.

- Q. There are several duties assigned to “management” or “Residential Services Director.” The proposed update would allow all staff to perform these duties with guidance from IFC Leadership.

Rationale

Any staff person on duty needs the authority to enforce all rules and supervise all activities.

- R. The GNP lists behaviors that will be grounds for ending the resident or guest’s tenure. The proposed update would not include a list, as this would be included in internal policy documents that are updated periodically.

Rationale

- Internal documents change as internal policies and procedures change to meet our needs, and it is not feasible to change the GNP every time an internal policy or procedure changes. It is not realistic or accurate for the GNP to name internal policies and procedures as static.
- As IFC learns more about best practices and available resources, staff gain alternate ways of responding to behaviors that do not always involve terminating a resident’s stay at the shelter. IFC does not want to force someone onto the street when there are other ways to handle an issue.

- S. The GNP states that when a former resident asks to return to Community House, staff will undertake a thorough review of incidents during former periods of residence as well as demonstrated improvements in behavior. The proposed update would state that this may happen in some, but not all, cases.

Rationale

- Some residents moved out of Community House without any problematic behavior and simply need to return because their living situation did not work out as they hoped.
- Sometimes residents are in crisis and need shelter as quickly as possible. Minor behavioral issues from a previous stay do not warrant keeping them out of shelter.

Practical Considerations

For residents who were extremely disruptive or had serious rule violations during their previous stay, their eligibility is noted in our database, and a thorough review would take place before their return.

- T. Community House Advisory Committee (CHAC) responsibilities are listed in the GNP:

- Instead of regularly providing reports and information, CHAC and/or IFC will provide reports and information upon request.

- CHAC will not hold workshops or trainings about homelessness issues and needs, as the Orange County Partnership to End Homelessness is already doing so.
- The CHAC will not hold an annual Open House, as this is disruptive to the residents' routine and has not been attended by community members in the past several years. IFC staff are happy to give tours of Community House to any community member upon request.
- CHAC will not maintain a neighborhood watch, as it does not have the capacity to do so, and Community House staff regularly monitor the property.
- CHAC will not be responsible for developing volunteer and work experience opportunities, as there are already community groups filling this role.

Rationale

The requirements listed above are duplicating existing community functions and/or resources.

The low level of community engagement we have experienced does not indicate a need to maintain the administrative burden of these functions under the purview of the CHAC.

Practical Considerations

- CHAC will remain in communication and will continue to be available to address concerns.
- IFC will provide information as requested.

- U. The GNP states that IFC will maintain up-to-date contact information, including 24-hour emergency contacts of Community House staff, IFC's management team, and CHAC members. The proposed update would direct callers to Community House's main number, which is staffed 24 hours a day.

Rationale

Staff on duty are responsible for answering phones and have 24-hour access to Community House Program Manager and/or Residential Services Director for any concerns that need to be elevated.

- V. The GNP states that IFC will establish a digital subscription service and/or listserv to distribute Community House news, reports, and meeting dates. The proposed update would remove this section.

Rationale

Interested community members can join IFC's regular mailing list.

- W. The GNP states that IFC will encourage Chapel Hill Police to use Community House as a site to complete paperwork, visit with residents, and check in with program staff. The proposed update would remove this item.

Rationale

Chapel Hill Police are best able to determine where their presence is needed in the community.

Practical Considerations

Community House has had and continues to have a close working relationship with local fire, safety and law enforcement agencies. This includes cooperating and working with their community crisis unit when circumstances and/or problems arise. IFC will also continue our long-term practice of cooperating with investigations, complying with subpoenas and allowing the local authorities access to the Community House facilities.

- X. The GNP states that Community House will maintain a discharge list that documents inappropriate behaviors, the persons involved and the duration of the discharge. The proposed update will indicate that IFC will keep all of this same information, simply not in list format.

### Rationale

Keeping the information in a searchable database rather than in list form allows for greater detail, as well as faster and easier access. Maintaining the list is a duplicated effort.

- Y. The GNP recommends that local governments establish and fund a separate emergency shelter. The proposed update recognizes that local government funding is limited and that local governments already contribute funding to address the area's homelessness needs through IFC.

### Rationale

Community House is an existing facility that can easily serve as an Emergency Shelter without requiring local governments to locate an additional site and fund an entirely new and separate program. In addition, the number of people experiencing homelessness in Orange County, as indicated by the 2018 Point in Time Count, does not warrant this investment or action.

- Z. Piedmont Health System's (PHS) satellite clinic located within Community House is only open to shelter residents. The proposed update would allow the clinic to see any PHS patient.

### Rationale

This update would better serve the community and fully utilize available clinic resources.

### **GNP items that will remain the same:**

1. The total number of beds/cots; there are currently 52 beds and 17 cots.
2. Possession and use of alcohol and illegal drugs are prohibited on the premises. Residents violating this rule are immediately discharged.
3. Individuals listed on the sex offender registry are not permitted to stay at Community House, due to external factors (i.e. proximity to childcare facility, etc).
4. Residents will continue to be encouraged to stay at Community House until they have obtained stable housing.
5. New residents will be introduced to a comprehensive orientation and assessment to identify individual strengths, as well as unmet needs. Staff and residents will work together to develop service plans that guide a resident to locating and moving into permanent housing. The service plan will include progress markers that lead to ending the person's homelessness.
6. Violence and criminal activities in and around Community House will not be tolerated. Documented arrests, charges and issues of inappropriate resident or guest behavior in and around Community House will be addressed by staff when brought to their attention. Disciplinary action will be commensurate with the infraction.
7. IFC has in place comprehensive security policies and procedures for the Community House campus with a special emphasis on entering and exiting the facility and exterior security. In addition, there are policies and procedures to prohibit public drunkenness, illegal drug use, weapons and criminal activity.
8. IFC will maintain exterior security lighting. Security cameras will be in place monitoring Community House interior and exterior activities and the driveway approaching the campus. Staff will be trained to monitor and operate camera equipment. Electronic security information will be monitored multiple times during each shift. Staff will report any unusual activity to the Residential Services Director (or his/her designee) and to the Chapel Hill Police, if appropriate.
9. IFC leadership is available to address emergencies 24 hours a day.