

INTERFAITH WINTER SHELTER INITIATIVE, PO BOX 1324, BLOOMINGTON, IN 47402-1324

Final Report

2009-2010 Winter Season

Rev. Dr. Thomas F. Capshew

5/11/2010

This document summarizes the activities of the Interfaith Winter Shelter Initiative in Bloomington, Indiana during the 2009-2010 season, from November 1, 2009 to March 31, 2010, during which 4572 bed/nights were provided to homeless individuals.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Interfaith Winter Shelter Initiative's mission for the 2009-2010 season was: "To provide a low barrier emergency winter shelter for homeless men and women, not families, in Bloomington, Indiana from November 1, 2009 to March 31, 2010. The hours of operation will be from 9 PM to 7 AM." Before opening the doors on November 1, 2009, three of the seven volunteer trainings were conducted. All told, 461 volunteers were trained and signed Volunteer Covenants. The season revolved around four sites, with nights and locations being Sunday at Alison-Jukebox, Monday and Tuesday at First United Church, Wednesday at Trinity Episcopal Church, Thursday and Friday at First Christian Church, and Saturday at Trinity Episcopal Church. 4572 bed/nights were supplied during the 151 nights of operation, averaging 30 guests per night. 93% of the guests identified themselves as Monroe County residents.

Volunteers came from several faith traditions, including Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Baha'i, Wiccan and Unitarian Universalist. Twenty-one faith communities signed on as partners, providing facilities, volunteers, in-kind and financial contributions. Thirteen governmental, service and business partners also participated.

Evaluations were consistently positive, with both suggestions for improvement and gratitude expressed by guests, volunteers and partners. Several volunteers indicated a willingness to volunteer again next season, and two sites from this season have already indicated their willingness to be a site again next year.

The IWSI Task Force has voted to provide an emergency low-barrier shelter again next season, from November 1, 2010 to March 31, 2011 using the same model of staffing with volunteers and governed by a Governing Board and paid Administrator.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page #
Executive Summary	2
Mission	4
Statistics	4
Guest Statistics	4
Volunteer Statistics.	4
Partner Statistics.	5
Financial Summary	6
Evaluations.	6
Guest Evaluations.	6
Volunteer Evaluations.	7
Partner Evaluations.	8
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).	8
First United Church.	9
Trinity Episcopal Church.	10
First United Methodist Church	11
Conclusion and Future Plan	13
Conclusion	13
Future Plan	13

MISSION

The mission of the Interfaith Winter Shelter Initiative (“IWSI”) for the 2009-2010 season was:

To provide a low barrier emergency winter shelter for homeless men and women, not families, in Bloomington, Indiana from November 1, 2009 to March 31, 2010. The hours of operation will be from 9 PM to 7 AM.

GUEST STATISTICS

Month	Total Guests	Males	Females	Monroe County Residents	Bus Tickets Distributed (program began 1/11/2010)
Nov 2009	681	641	40	571	0
Dec 2009	911	815	96	817	0
Jan 2010	1052	917	135	1010	336
Feb 2010	983	895	88	948	467
Mar 2010	945	881	64	920	438
Totals	4572	4149	423	4266	1241

The age of our guests ranged from 19 to 91, ninety-one percent of the guests were male, with the majority of guests males between the ages of 35 to 55. Ninety-three percent identified as Monroe County residents.

Out of the 4572 bed/nights, nine (9) individuals were suspended for disruptive behavior for one (1) night. Out of those nine (9) individuals, six (6) were later suspended for seven (7) nights. Out of those six (6) individuals, two (2) were later suspended for thirty (30) nights, and one (1) of those was suspended for the rest of the season.

VOLUNTEER STATISTICS

Our volunteers came from nearly every faith community in Bloomington, including Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Baha’i, Wiccan and Unitarian Universalism. Some volunteers did not identify with any faith tradition and others identified with other secular organizations, including a large group of Indiana University faculty, staff and students. Volunteer trainings were conducted on October 14, 2009, October 19, 2009, October 25, 2009, November 16, 2009, December 10, 2009, January 12, 2010 and January 27, 2010, resulting in 461 signed Volunteer Covenants for the season.

In addition to the seven trainings, we conducted 4 training updates, addressing pressing issues and working toward consistent application of the rules and procedures, which were gathered together and approved as the Standard Operating Procedures Manual by the Interfaith Winter Shelter Task Force in January 2010.

The number of hours volunteered for the season is estimated at 5814 hours, 38.5 hours per night for 151 nights.

PARTNER STATISTICS

The services provided to our guests were centered around four sites rotating over seven nights:

- Sundays at the Allison-Jukebox (City of Bloomington)
- Mondays at First United Church
- Tuesdays at First United Church
- Wednesdays at Trinity Episcopal Church
- Thursdays at First Christian Church
- Fridays at First Christian Church
- Saturdays at Trinity Episcopal Church

In all, at least twenty-one faith communities have participated and partnered in the project:

Baha'is of Bloomington; Beth Shalom; Clear Creek Christian Church; Exodus Congregation of Bloomington; Fairview United Methodist Church; First Christian Church (shelter site); First Presbyterian Church; First United Church (shelter site); First United Methodist Church; Mennonite Fellowship of Bloomington; Second Baptist Church; Sherwood Oaks Christian Church; St. Charles Catholic Church; St. Mark's United Methodist Church; St. Paul Catholic Center; St. Thomas Lutheran Church; Tibetan Mongolian Buddhist Cultural Center; Trinity Episcopal Church (shelter site); Unitarian Universalist Church; Unity Bloomington; University Baptist Church.

In addition to faith communities, the following governmental, social service and business partners have contributed to the success of the 2009-2010 season:

Bloomington Parks & Recreation Allison-Jukebox Center (shelter site); Bloomington Police Department; City of Bloomington; Monroe County; Perry Township; Martha's House; Shalom Community Center; St. Vincent DePaul; The Catholic Worker Community; United Way of Monroe County (fiscal agent); Bloomington Bagel Company; Crosstown Cleaners; and The Pour House Cafe.

Several members of the community and members of local faith communities, as well as businesses, made contributions of money, time or “in-kind” goods.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

The operating expenses for the 2009-2010 season totaled \$65,396.79, with the largest two individual items being laundry and the Administrator contract. As a result of the generosity of our faith communities, granting agencies, individuals, governmental, business and social service partners, we were able to pay all the 2009-2010 season operating expenses and have a balance to begin the 2010-2011 season.

GUEST EVALUATIONS

Guests were provided with the opportunity to submit written evaluations and come to two scheduled focus groups. One written evaluation questioned the 9:00 opening policy when below freezing, wondered why the guests cannot volunteer, and suggested showing a movie to calm the guests down.

The first focus group, held at 3:00 pm on Wednesday March 17, 2010 had 3 participants. Ideas/suggestions/concerns expressed at this meeting included:

- opening the doors earlier on colder nights, especially on Saturdays and Sundays when the library closes at 5:00 pm
- some sites had the heat too low
- a year-round shelter is needed
- guests could help with set up and tear down if the shelters open earlier
- rules at different sites were not consistent

the second focus group was held at 7:00 am on Thursday March 25, 2010 and had 21 attendees, including two people who had not been guests but offered suggestions. The comments from the guests on how to improve the shelter for next season included:

- some sites exhibited too much control, compared to one site where they were treated as adults and it showed because there were no police calls at that site
- some volunteers showed contempt for guests, like kicking bunks to wake them in the morning
- screen volunteers so that they will not dominate guests (most volunteers good, but some treat guests with contempt)
- would like to help in setting up and/or tearing down the sites
- keep the shelter open year-round
- if it is 4 degrees outside, shelter should open early

The guests were asked what went well, and their comments included:

- shelter prevents losing a foot due to frostbite – no one died from exposure this year
- loved the shelter – thank you!
- Three cheers for staff
- Have someone on staff who has been homeless so they are sensitive
- Great to have decaf at night and regular in morning. Chamomile tea at night would help calm people down to sleep

The end of the focus group became a discussion of how difficult it is to get a job and what options will be available for the homeless population for places to sleep after March 31, 2010.

VOLUNTEER EVALUATIONS

The Volunteer Evaluation forms were distributed by hard copy at the sites as well as emailed to all volunteers in the database. 45 evaluations were returned, with the age range of volunteers responding between 18 and 79 years old. Members of thirteen different faith traditions responded, including in alphabetical order, Baha’i Faith, Beth Shalom, Bloomington Mennonite Fellowship, First Christian Church, First United Church, First United Methodist Church, Open Door Church, Sherwood Oaks Christian Church, St. John’s Catholic Church, St. Mark’s United Methodist Church, St. Paul Catholic Center, St. Thomas Lutheran Church, and Trinity Episcopal Church. One volunteer associated their time with Circle K of Indiana University and eight respondents did not associate their volunteer time with any faith community or organization.

Many respondents spoke of things they gained or learned from the experience, including the ecumenical nature, seeing the guests as human, and a greater understanding of poverty and homelessness. One respondent stated: “There are a lot of people in Bloomington who are in need, and there are a lot of people who care!”

The evaluation asked the respondents to rank the program on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being a failure and 10 being top notch. Rankings ranged from 6 to 10, with the arithmetic mean 8.3, the median 8 and the mode 8. One respondent stated: “This program was amazing. The leadership phenomenal. The impact on the community infinite. The sacrifice by many inspiring.”

Many respondents offered suggestions for next year, some of which conflicted. For example, several stated that more consistency is needed across sites while a few others said more flexibility is needed across sites. Also, some said having one site for all nights would be an improvement, while another said seven sites for next year would be an improvement. Several mentioned training improvement suggestions, such as

more training on de-escalation of conflict, as well as finding ways to allow the guests to assist if they are interested.

Of the 45 respondents, 39 indicated they would like to be contacted to volunteer next year. 14 indicated they would be interested in helping plan the shelter next year.

PARTNER EVALUATIONS

Each faith community that housed the shelter conducted a evaluation meeting at their site, including First United Church, First Christian Church, Trinity Episcopal Church, and First United Methodist Church, who coordinated the efforts at the Allison-Jukebox site on Sunday evenings.

Here are the summaries of the evaluation meetings at the sites:

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) (by Jo Weddle)

On December 21, 2008, the Vision/Goals Committee of First Christian Church presented a report to the church Board. In that report, after conducting an intensive study over several months to determine the mission priorities that would guide FCC into the next five years, the Board approved the report as presented which included one priority to “serve and engage the wider community, specifically college students and those living in poverty.”

At that time, FCC was “reaching out” through The Gathering Place, a breakfast program on Sunday mornings for those in need in our community, and by contracting with Shalom to use a portion of the church building during the weekdays for a portion of their services.

A Poverty Task Force, a sub-committee of the Vision Implementation Committee, was formed which began meeting the spring of 2009. The purpose of the Task Force was to determine how to further the mission of reaching out to those in poverty. When interfaith conversations began the following summer to determine the organization of a low-barrier winter shelter, our church became part of the planning. On July 19, 2009, the FCC Board approved a resolution to partner with other faith communities to help realize ministry to those living in poverty and needing emergency shelter. The Poverty Task Force then directed the promotion and organization of FCC’s involvement with the shelter.

From November 1, 2009 – March 31, 2010, FCC housed the winter shelter on Thursday and Friday nights. St. Paul Catholic Center and Sherwood Oaks Christian Church

directed Thursday nights and Fairview Methodist Church joined First Christian Church for the Friday night sessions. On Friday nights alone, a total of 81 shelter volunteers served over the five months, 36 of which were FCC members, 10 Fairview Methodist members, and 35 from outside our two churches. Many other people, both inside and outside our congregation, participated in various ways such as sewing blankets, constructing shelving, donating bedding and other supplies, and making financial contributions.

After the shelter closed at the end of March, a process of evaluation was made to determine what occurred that was best and how we might improve in the next year. An evaluation form was completed by those in attendance during early and late services on March 7, 2010, and a meeting was held to which all volunteers were invited on April 14, 2010. The overwhelming responses were positive with the recommendation that FCC participate in the shelter next winter. In addition, many constructive suggestions were made for improvement. On April 15, a final report was given to the FCC Cabinet asking them to recommend that the church Board give their affirmation for the shelter to continue from November 2010 - March 2011. At the April 18, 2010 meeting, the FCC Board voted to affirm and approve the shelter as an on-going ministry of FCC on a year-to-year basis. The Poverty Task Force continues to examine and support additional ways to reach out to those in poverty in our community in the months and years ahead.

First United Church (by Jack Skiles)

First United Church (FUC) of Bloomington served delightfully alongside the many other partners in the formation and implementation the IFWS project in the 2009-2010 season. FUC was both a Monday and Tuesday evening site and partnered directly with the faith communities of Beth Shalom, University Baptist, St. Thomas and the Mennonite Fellowship of Bloomington. We were five congregations serving two nights.

FUC hosted a maximum of forty overnight guests and only on one occasion exceeded that number to forty-three. Our guests slept on two single pads that had been donated to our effort from the local Girl Scout camp that was part of a bankruptcy action. Our partners joined with us in securing the additional sheets, pillow/cases, towels and blankets.

Our congregation voted to be a part of the IFWS and in evaluation of the first season our Church Council has recommended that our congregation participate again in 2010/11.

FUC has been most happy to join in a multi-faith partnership with the many folks of greater Monroe County who find themselves homeless for the wide array of reasons that create homelessness. We look forward to partnering on many fronts as we struggle as a people to meet some of the most basic needs for shelter that we all share.

Trinity Episcopal Church (by Virginia Hall)

In May of 2009, Trinity began breakfast meetings with the larger faith community, primarily from an invitation to the Monroe County Religious Leaders' group to assess the level of interest in participating in an emergency winter shelter along the lines of the winter shelter Trinity hosted from January through March of 2009. For several reasons, Trinity felt she needed help if the program were to expand and to be more sustainable, for the following reasons:

1. We felt that 7 nights/week strained our volunteers.
2. We wanted to expand the operation to at least 5 months to address the longer winter.
3. Staffing a sufficient number of volunteers was difficult for one congregation.
4. Volunteers experienced a transformation of their understanding of homelessness and poverty and wanted more people to have this opportunity.
5. It would strengthen our interfaith connections and bring an increased awareness of the multiple problems of homelessness to the wider Bloomington community.
6. With greater resources we operate a more sustainable program.

Conversations continued through July when we discovered an all volunteer model based on the Chicago PADS program that seemed to address the above concerns. Trinity's agreed to host the shelter for two nights/week when only four sites could be found: Wednesdays and Saturdays. With an all volunteer model we found two nights difficult and half way through the season we were fortunate to collaborate with St. Mark's in assisting us to staff the second night.

Support and enthusiasm came in terms of volunteers, donations of food, blanket and financial contributions. 79 different volunteers worked shifts at Trinity through the season. At least 34 Trinity folks volunteered for various shifts from a few shifts to many who volunteered weekly throughout the 5-month season. One of our volunteers created the google doc. which greatly increased the ability of volunteers to sign-up on line. This contribution was shared with other groups and proved to be invaluable. Combined with St. Mark's there were at least 56 volunteers in the month of January. The congregation as a whole felt pride in having success last winter when fears were allayed and new friendships were found. The main difference this year was that we would not have a paid professional staff (Shalom) but rely on increased volunteer

training and a paid administrator. The following observations were made by a community conversation and survey conducted in late March. About 20 people attended this evaluation.

1. There was strong agreement on the value of Trinity's participation.
2. There was a mixed response to how well informed people felt about the shelter. Trinity could improve its communication among members, keep them more updated on numbers, experiences of volunteers, etc.
3. The majority were glad that the shelter was shared with the interfaith community noting that they were pleasantly surprised by the coordination and how nice it was to share. Others remarked at how informative training sessions were. Disagreements centered around the varying enforcement of rules from place to place.
4. The majority felt their perspective on homeless has changed because of involvement with the winter shelter.
5. The majority see that our participation in the shelter is a living out of Christ's call.
6. People who didn't volunteer felt that it was because of personal demands, scheduling or that they were uncomfortable relating to this population.
7. All felt that they would like Trinity to consider participating in a shelter next year. Comments included revisiting the addition of professional help, greater involvement on the city's part and the desire for a permanent shelter.
8. Additional suggestions: increased volunteer training, especially around communication and de-escalation techniques; clearer definition of volunteer coordinator's tasks, recruitment and emergency contact information; seek additional sites so that each site is responsible for only one night; address the issue of holiday and late night shifts which are more difficult to fill.

First United Methodist Church (by Patty Andrews)

On March 29, 2010, I convened a feedback session at First United Methodist Church to assess the church's involvement with the 2009-2010 Interfaith Winter Shelter as well as discussing how effectively the Jukebox worked as a shelter site. Prior to the meeting, I sent out a feedback questionnaire to my entire volunteer distribution list. I received about 20 formal responses to this questionnaire, and 20+ people attended the meeting (about 60% overlap between these two groups).

For the 2009-2010 shelter season:

- FUMC church members and groups (i.e., Outreach Committee and United Methodist Women) donated just under \$5,000 to support the shelter.

- Dozens of volunteers provided food (soup, bread, cheese, fruit, and dessert) over 21 Sunday nights. Meal providers included FUMC groups (UMW, FUMC Youth, etc.) and others (e.g., TMBCC, BABS, and HT volunteers).
- Fifty-eight different individuals volunteered at the Jukebox—36 from FUMC and 22 from other faith communities or other groups (just over 60% from FUMC).
- We hired Erin Marshall, a professional social worker who had also worked at the Trinity shelter the year before, to oversee the guest intake process from 8:00-midnight each evening.

Based on feedback from the questionnaire and meeting, the following conclusions were reached:

- The overwhelming majority (75%) want FUMC to serve as a shelter site for 2010-2011 (although most thought the Jukebox had served as an acceptable site). A small group will carry forth this request to church leadership.
- Volunteers felt we had been highly successful in creating a welcoming, humane, and hospitable environment for our guests. Factors that contributed to this were listed as:
 - Many volunteers having background with guests through volunteering at Shalom and related agencies
 - Exceptional dedication of leadership and volunteers, with multiple shifts served by many.
 - Adequate volunteer training
 - Professional staff presence
 - Offering hot soup as a gesture of caring and hospitality
 - Interacting as equals with guests
 - Flexibility with rules/procedures (e.g., letting guests in a few minutes early on especially cold nights, providing several smoking breaks, etc).
- Ways to improve for the coming year included these suggestions:
 - Improve general volunteer training to be less fear-focused and to better emphasize conflict management and de-escalation.
 - In addition to general volunteer training, site-specific training should be added.
 - Cot quality should be uniform.
 - Concern over blanket mildew because of mold/mildew problems identified by City at Jukebox caused some to wonder if blanket replacement would be necessary.
 - Some asked for more emphasis on environmentally-friendly cleaning products.
 - Simplify meals with continued emphasis on soup.
 - Share leadership roles, with separate site and volunteer coordinators and shift leaders.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE PLAN

CONCLUSION

In the first year of the Interfaith Winter Shelter Initiative, the project experienced growing pains and great successes. Consistency across sites was the most constant point of friction and the involvement of hundreds of volunteers from every major faith tradition, twenty-one partner faith communities and thirteen governmental, service and business entities to provide 4572 bed/nights testifies to a resounding success.

FUTURE PLAN

In the Spring of 2010, the IWSI Task Force adopted the following statement:

To continue providing a safe, secure, low barrier winter shelter that uses faith-based community facilities and secular sites, as available, for sheltering homeless guests, staffed with volunteers, and guided by a hired Administrator and a Governing Board.

The IWSI Task Force has also agreed to create a Interfaith Winter Shelter Initiative Governing Board, comprised of 5-7 members, to replace the Task Force as the decision making body of the Interfaith Winter Shelter Initiative. No decisions have been made to continue providing services beyond March 31, 2011.