

One resident told the Advance, "It makes me scared and it makes my kids scared. I want my kids to have a happy day and good dreams. My kids are my life and I want them to have an American future. I don't want them to be scared and mess up school. I don't want them to worry they can't go outside."

Another echoed, "Besides having young children on [our street], we also have lots of senior citizens who are afraid to leave their homes for fears they are being watched when they leave."

With all due respect, if you fear the presence of four developmentally disabled and UCP-approved staff members to that extreme degree, that irrational phobia is pretty much your problem to overcome, not the clients' or UCP's or the community board's. The group residence experience all over Staten Island has been generally positive, as those residences' neighbors can attest. Before concocting wildly bizarre "what-if" scenarios, why not find out the facts? Again, the chances are better that you have more to fear from some of your "normal" neighbors than from supervised developmentally disabled residents. For example, someone threw a chair across the room in anger at the end of the meeting Wednesday. Who would you rather have as a neighbor, someone who throws a chair at a public meeting because he didn't get what he wanted, or mildly retarded young people?

Francine Balk, a mother of one of the young people who will live in the Oakwood residence, said; "Sometimes it is fear of the unknown that leads them to oppose the homes." She's being charitable. If this were 20 or 30 years ago, perhaps the "fear of the unknown" defense would apply, but after all we've learned and all the information, including from first-hand experience, that's available, there's no excuse for not knowing any longer. Sometimes, fear comes just from being willfully ignorant.

We commend the residents of Charleston for setting such a fine example and avoiding such a foolish scene and we commend Community Board 3 for being patient with this kind of inane rhetoric, resisting the angry demands and coming down on the right side of the issue. So will the residents in Oakwood some day.