

# State Repossesses Center City Had Sought for a Jail

By RALPH BLUMENTHAL

The State Department of Mental Hygiene has just repossessed an abandoned downtown state drug treatment center that the head of the City Board of Correction had been seeking, to relieve prison overcrowding.

While the city official, William J. vanden Heuvel, was still appealing through the courts for use of the well-equipped, \$7-million facility at 75 Morton Street, in Greenwich Village, the land-lord—New York State—moved in its mental retardation clinic last week.

## Nine Centers Abandoned

"You can't argue with mental retardation," Mr. vanden Heuvel, a lawyer and former associate of the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy, said in an interview, conceding defeat after a six-month struggle.

His campaign, however, has served to refocus attention on prison overcrowding, on the status of the 10 drug treatment centers shut down last May by the State Narcotic Addiction Control Commission after severe budget cuts and on the programs for those centers and others by the State Mental Hygiene Department.

Except for the Morton Street facility, which was vacant for nine months, the drug centers remain abandoned. Two of the nine closed centers are here in the city, where the great majority of the state's estimated 165,000 drug addicts live.

The remaining 21 major facilities that are open provide in- and out-patient care and both methadone and drug-abstinence programs for about 10,500 of the 165,000 addicts.

In a recent interview, Howard A. Jones, chairman of the State Narcotics Commission, said he thought the proposed expansion of New York City's ambulatory methadone maintenance program from the current 3,000 former heroin addicts to 11,000 by June would be "too rapid an increase."

## Closings Please Residents

Last year's budget cuts, which pared the requested state drug-control allocation

25 per cent to \$91.7-million, besides forcing the closing of the 10 centers, led to the dismissal of 1,500 of the program's 5,500 employees, the abolition of 500 other vacant positions, reduction by half of the in-patient addict population, then totaling 6,500, and the limiting of new patients — excluding addicts with criminal sentences.

The closed centers include Cross Bay in Howard Beach, Queens, a bankrupt hospital that the state converted to treat 230 addicts at a cost of \$6.7-million for—as it turned out — 14 months before it was abandoned; Manhattan State, adjoining the hospital on Wards Island in the Bronx; Middletown State, at the hospital in Middletown, and Matteawan state hospital in Beacon.

The other centers were at the prisons of Albion (now shut down), Mid-Hudson, two at Green Haven, and Great Meadow.

Happiest over the closings were the neighboring residents, particularly in Greenwich Village and Queens, who described the centers as sources of crime and narcotics.

The Department of Mental Hygiene, for which the facilities were built and to which the centers reverted after they were shut down by the narcotics commission, has decided to use some of the facilities as centers for the retarded.

The five boroughs now send about 4,600 retarded patients to the city's only residential facility, Willowbrook, on Staten Island, forcing 7,400 others into the state schools of Letchworth Village, Wasaic and Suffolk. Dr. Frederick Grunberg, deputy commissioner for mental retardation and children's services, calls the need for expanded city facilities "desperate."

## Lack of Funds Cited

However, like the Narcotics commission, the Mental Hygiene Department lacks funds.

Consequently, plans to activate a number of the former drug centers, particularly the facilities at Morton Street, Cross Bay and Manhattan State Hospital, await disposition of the department's request to the State

for an additional \$16-million, bringing its total budget to \$600-million.

Meanwhile, aware of Mr. Vanden Heuvel's interest in the Morton Street facility, the department has decided to move its small clinic from existing quarters at 15 Park Row into a part of the large facility.

"From where we sit," said Susan Neal, a psychologist at the clinic and one of the 13 starting staff members, "having the building is half the battle."

## Modern Center Planned

According to the head of the clinic, Dr. Cyrus W. Stimson, and mental hygiene officials, with the proposed funding, the facility would become a sophisticated center for the retarded, where patients and their parents could live together for brief periods and where parents could drop off their retarded children for day care.

The facility has a gymnasium, screened-off, four-bed living units and fully equipped two workshops for the patients.

Some critics have questioned the department's ability to gauge realistically its needs in terms of the funding it can reasonably hope to get.

"They can't possibly use what they have, it's obvious," said Dr. Edward L. Pinney, president of the New York State Hospitals Medical Alumni Association.

## 580 Beds Now Vacant

Acknowledging that, at present, about 580 beds at the Morton Street site, at a facility in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and at the Queens State School are vacant because of lack of funds to hire staff members and that 750 beds in Brooklyn will be ready this summer—Dr. Grunberg asserted, nevertheless, that "I haven't the slightest doubt we will be using the facilities to full capacity within two years."

Mr. Vanden Heuvel suggested that the needs of both retarded children and jail inmates might be served by devising a program in which minor offenders awaiting trial would work in the clinic, easing the staff shortage and contributing to their own rehabilitation and training.

Mr. vanden Heuvel suggested a program had been tried, with some success, in New Jersey and in England. Meanwhile, he has been turned away, after having been told that the Mental Hygiene Department will soon be ready to develop the centers it is reserving for its own programs.

## Appeal Made to Judge

Until the clinic moved into Morton Street, Mr. vanden Heuvel had been appealing almost daily to Judge Harold A. Stevens, presiding justice of the Appellate Division, First Department, to designate the center to take overflow detainees under a little-known section of the state correction law giving him the responsibility to find a new detention facility if the present jail, the Manhattan House of Detention for Men—the so-called Tombs, "becomes unfit or unsafe for the confinement of some or all of the prisoners. . . ."

Most days the Tombs has nearly double its maximum capacity of 932 inmates awaiting trial. Judge Stevens has not yet ruled on the Commissioner's request.

Still, the thought of what obtaining the facility might mean tantalizes Mr. vanden Heuvel and Dr. Vincent Dole of the Rockefeller University, who developed the successful methadone program now used in the Tombs.

Dr. Dole said: "If we could get this facility, we could move thousands of addicts out of our [jail] system." He foresaw two-week treatment cycles for 50 residential inmates, which would mean detoxification programs for 13,000 addicts a year.

Meanwhile, the one sentiment all parties seemed to agree on was articulated by Dr. Grunberg, who said:

"Let us hope that one day, considering this is the wealthiest country in the world, we won't have to compete like this for human services."