

Half-way units OK'd for Willowbrook

By JOAN MOTYKA

The New York State Department of Mental Hygiene has given final approval for the establishment of two half-way houses on Staten Island for Willowbrook State School residents.

To bridge the gap between institutionalization and community living, the homes will be set in established neighborhoods to "fit the kind of living done in the area," according to one state official.

A house-finding staff of the state department is currently working to find suitable dwellings which will meet safety requirements and have community resources for the residents.

The department hopes to buy two houses and negotiations with the owners will be followed by approval by the departments. Necessary renovations and furnishing will then be done to allow occupancy.

One house which is considered usable has already been found. The department has been authorized to spend between \$35,000 and \$70,000.

Each resident will be given as much privacy as possible, and single and double rooms are expected to accomplish this.

"We want to make it like a home," a department spokesman said.

House parents will live in the houses and five new budget slots have been created to pay

them. Additional Willowbrook staff members, to include one grade 13 and four grade 9 workers, will augment the staff of each house but will not live in.

One house will be for mildly or moderately retarded ambulatory adults, both male and female, and the other will accommodate severely and possibly profoundly retarded adults.

The first will provide a six-month program in community living for the residents to prepare them for independent living. All must have either a job or workshop placement before they can move in.

The second, to provide longer term care, is expected to be staffed by a Willowbrook psychologist and will have a behavior modification program and more extensive services.

The establishment of half-way houses on Staten Island is one step in a program to transfer Willowbrook residents to independent living, family care homes and other state facilities.

It is a means of complying with the April federal court order demanding a ratio of one attendant per nine residents at Willowbrook. Dr. Miodrag Ristich, Willowbrook director, claimed this can be done by either increasing staff size or decreasing resident population.

The Staten Island half-way houses should prepare the residents for eventual placement in the New York City

area, according to Dr. Ristich.

Another Willowbrook attempt to meet the order entails the transfer of about 100 residents by January to an eight-county area in upstate New York.

They will be placed in family care homes, the newest state facilities. It is non-resident and adheres to the developmental approach to mental retardation, in which people are encouraged to progress at their own pace.

Willowbrook has compiled a list of 500 upstate residents to be matched up with 100 to 500 Willowbrook residents who have come from the upstate area or who have relatives there, or who have no correspondents.

"Everybody who could be placed in a family care home should be. It's desirable," Dr. Ristich claimed. "If the quickest way to do that is to send them upstate, then it should be done."