

Agency to aid 'Volunteers'

North Shore residence for retarded planned

By ROBERT MIRALDI

A permanent community residence for 15 mildly mentally retarded adults from Staten Island is being planned for the North Shore, the Advance has learned.

The residence is being sponsored, planned and administered by the Volunteers of America, the Manhattan-based, non-profit religious-social-welfare organization. The state Department of Mental Hygiene, however, is expected to pick up almost half the tab for the project.

Although no definite site has been selected, one North Shore location is under "serious consideration," according to Lt. Colonel Belle Leach, National Social Welfare Secretary for the Volunteers.

Community Board 2 will be informed about the general concept as well as the site under consideration at its January meeting, says Mrs. Leach. She also claims that the Volunteers will apprise neighborhood residents with a door-to-door information campaign.

No timetable for development of the residence has been established, but, says Mrs. Leach, as soon as—and if—the community board gives its approval the purchase procedure will get underway.

Howard Safar, administrator of the Staten Island Mental Health Society, estimates that the residence is "a few years away" from becoming reality. Mrs. Leach says "a matter of months" is more realistic.

The hostel for retarded adults comes right on the

heels of a similar residence that is slated to open this summer at 200 Tysen St. That facility has met considerable community opposition, precipitating, in fact, the birth of the North Shore ad hoc coalition to examine health-related facilities.

There are significant differences, however, between the Department of Mental Hygiene Tysen St. halfway house and the Volunteers' hostel.

Aside from funding, there are variations in supervision. Both have 24-hour supervision,

but the Volunteers' residence will have a live-in director. Tysen St. will be staffed by three 8-hour shifts of workers. Half the beds in the facility would be filled by retarded adults (18-50) now living with families on Staten Island. The rest would come from the eligible population at Willowbrook Developmental Center.

The city Bureau of Mental Retardation estimates that there are approximately 8,863 retarded on Staten Island. The bureau says that "the need for residential services remains the most critical need in the Borough of Richmond."

Mrs. Beatrice Victor, chairman of the Staten Island Regional Retardation and Disability Council, says that a big fear of parents with retarded children is, "What will happen to our children when we die?"

"This community residence will begin to meet that dire need," says Mrs. Leach.

The goal of the project, according to a 28-page document prepared by the Volunteers, "is to design an in-house program that will be responsive

to the needs of adults who are mentally retarded to live as independently and productively as possible while still receiving necessary protection and supervision."

Open to both men and women, the residence's program, according to the report, will be designed for persons who need long-term supervised living accommodations and who are able to participate in community day activities, sheltered workshop employment and, possibly for some, community employment.

As in the Tysen St. facility, there will be one or two respite (or floating use) beds. Respite care "would be to relieve critical family situations, allow opportunity for 'experiencing' hostel living for a retarded adult and separation for the family...to allow family vacation time."

It is expected that there will be four full-time and three part-time employees. The director will receive a \$15,000 salary; the assistant director \$11,000.

Operating expenses, says Mrs. Leach, will be \$122,930. The Department of Mental Hygiene will pay \$59,930 of that while federal Supplemental Security Income is expected to fund the remainder.

Significantly, it is expected that the per person cost for a year will be \$8,195, almost half the cost of institutionalization at Willowbrook.

Once the community residence for retarded adults is functioning smoothly, it is expected that the director will move to develop an additional residence—run by the Volunteers of America—on Staten Island.

The Volunteers are presently operating, in cooperation with the Downs Syndrome Foundation Inc., a developmental training center for children on Joline Ave., Totenville.