

Aid to Retarded programs threatened by \$\$ cuts

By CAROLYN DE LUCA

A private, non-profit organization which operates facilities for more than 200 retarded children and adults on Staten Island is bracing itself for budget cuts which will have a severe effect on summer programs and may cut into year-round staff and pupils.

Mrs. Joan Hodum, director of Staten Island Aid for the Retarded, announced yesterday that "expected cuts in money from the Department of Mental Hygiene and the Board of Education, coupled with inflation...put us in a position of having to cut back on programs."

She estimated a deficit of "at best, \$80,000 for the fiscal year beginning July 1."

Staten Island Aid for the Retarded maintains three facilities for both adults and children at a yearly operating cost of about \$400,000.

The largest facility is the Children's Day Center on Castleton Ave., West Brighton, which provides eight educational programs for a total of 140 persons year-round and for 60 during the summer. Students range from toddlers to adults and from the mildly to the profoundly retarded.

A Saturday program, which offers trips and recreational activities, is "on the cutting board," according to Mrs. Hodum. The next to go would be a five-week summer program for the day center pupils.

"This is a vital program," remarked the director. "It maintains the growth that has been experienced during the

school year. Our children could regress terribly during the summer without it."

Across the street from the center is another program sponsored by Staten Island Aid. Here, a daily class in life and work skills is conducted for retarded adults. Training in self-discipline, manners and independence is offered.

The third program is a "sheltered workshop" where 40 retarded adults work daily on paid contracts. At this Staten Island Aid Training Center, located in Stapleton, these adults are paid small fees for performing simple but necessary tasks. For them, it is the first and only experience to earn something for themselves.

"There is a good possibility that we will have to cut back on overall staff and students."

Mrs. Hodum predicted if the budget cuts are enforced. She added that the expected reductions are "horrendous in terms of maintaining current services, not to mention allowing for growth or expansion."

She mentioned that her organization's programs are instrumental in implementing the plan to deinstitutionalize the Willowbrook Developmental Center, since the facilities provide not only training and education, but counseling and family services.

"We're just not in a position to assist those people who will be coming out of Willowbrook," she said.

Referring to pupils who may not be accepted in Staten Island Aid facilities due to cuts, she implied that this could lead to the other extreme, or more institutionalization of

the retarded on the Island.

"If there are youngsters that have no program available, this compels the parent, who is faced with many problems, to the extent that consideration must be given to institutionalization," she said.

While most pupils attend the programs free of charge, children and adults who are either above or below school age are charged tuition on a sliding scale.

The main sources of funds for the organization are the city and state Boards of Education, which last year contributed close to \$140,000; the state Department of Mental Hygiene, which added about \$133,000, and the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation plus federal and state grants. Fund-raising covered 10 per cent of the operating costs.

Although at this time Mrs. Hodum does not know for sure what reductions will be made in the budget, she estimated a cut of about \$39,000 in education funds and close to \$40,000 in money from the Department of Mental Hygiene.

Although she has been "going from door to door, asking for help from various agencies" all week, she admits that "I just don't know where I'm going to get the extra funds."

She mentioned that the Staten Island Aid for Retarded Children Auxiliary is accepting summer recreation program scholarships.