

# Parents unit to run home for the retarded

The controversial state Department of Mental Hygiene New Brighton group home for the retarded has been handed over for operation to the Willowbrook Benevolent Society, a citywide parents advocate group.

A proposal made by the voluntary group will soon be confirmed by state officials and the 200 Tysen St. facility could be in operation in three to four months, it has been learned.

The two-phase proposal would eventually place 8 to 14 mildly retarded Staten Island residents of Willowbrook Developmental Center in the two-story, wood-frame house.

In its first year of operation, the hostel would only provide 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily living activities training for Willowbrook residents who will eventually be dispersed back to the city and their home boroughs.

After the first year, however, the hostel will provide a long-term round-the-clock sheltered home-like environment, with all residents attending day workshops during the week and receiving parental-like supervision in the evenings.

"Who more than parents have the well-being of children at heart," said Jerry Isaacs of the Benevolent Society, explaining his group's proposal. "Parents provide better watchdogs over expenditures and will insure the delivery of optimal services to children."

Anthony Pinto, president of Benevolent Society, said he expects a "negative community reaction," but feels that can be overcome "when the neighbors have a chance to meet people in the program and discover they are not ogres but are rather good citizens."

Harold C. Piepenbrink, Willowbrook director, confirmed the Tysen St. hostel changeover, but said it was "just a proposal at this point.

"They're interested and we're interested," Piepenbrink said. Piepenbrink added, however, that there is no plan at this point for a full-time hostel. The first phase of operation would first have to succeed in the community, he said.

The first phase, he said, would "alleviate some of the fears, and the parents will have to work diligently at it."

The state Department of Mental Hygiene, he said, has given up the operation "because Willowbrook should be used as a resource rather than the state go the whole way with community development.

"They are community programs and the community should run it," he said.

About the original Tysen St.

proposal, which called for the state to operate the facility full time, Piepenbrink said: "Even if the community was opposed I am told it would have gone through. I don't buy that concept. The state supreme concept will not work."

When the state initially revealed plans to operate the Tysen St. hostel, slated to open this month or early fall, the surrounding New Brighton, West Brighton and Livingston communities voiced strong opposition.

A proliferation of health-related facilities and group homes for a wide of range socially troubled city residents in the adjacent area caused the community to protest Tysen St.—the straw that broke the camel's back, one resident said.

The opposition culminated in a raucous community board session where the Department of Mental Hygiene was verbally confronted with community opposition to state methods.

Most observers feel today, four months after that May meeting, that the hostel is opposed only by a vocal minori-

ty. Despite on-the-record opposition from Community Board 2, observers feel there is a broad-based support in the community today for the hostel.

Piepenbrink says that community opposition was "not really" the reason for the state backing out of the operational end of Tysen St. Sources at Willowbrook, however, say that one of Piepenbrink's first acts when he became director in March was to table the Tysen St. facility.

A federal court consent decree, agreed to by the state, has mandated that the state make at least 200 community placements in foster or group homes by April 1976.

A voluntary agency, the Volunteers of America, has been looking for a site for development of a second halfway house or hostel. No definite site has been found, although a house on Westervelt Ave., New Brighton, is under consideration.

Benevolent Society officials have been making unofficial visits with community representatives in an attempt to avoid the type of community uproar that greeted the first proposal.

The parents group has hired a part-time hostel coordinator, Mrs. Ruth Wong Roza, and the society is hoping for eventual implementation of one hostel, run by the Benevolent Society, in each borough of the city.

In response to questions, Mrs. Roza said there was no valid basis for community fear of the mentally retarded who, she said, "are generally docile individuals, more often victims than anything else.

"These people are easily conned and taken advantage of," she explained. "We want a good neighborhood and we need their good will and good neighborliness."

A formal proposal for the Benevolent Society to take over the operation of the hostel is expected to be made before Community Board 2 at its September meeting. Leaders of the board have already been apprised of the proposal.

— ROBERT MIRALDI