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Plea for foster homes for Willowbrook residents meets with 'overwhelming response' on Island

By SANDRA ZUMMO

"The response was overwhelming!" Those were the words used by Andrew Cook to describe Staten Islanders' reply to a cry for help from the Willowbrook Developmental Center three weeks ago.

Cook is borough coordinator of the Metropolitan Placement Unit there, charged with placing 200 Willowbrook residents who are Staten Island natives back into the community.

In an article which appeared in the Feb. 6 Lifestyle section of the Advance, he spoke of the need for foster homes for clients aged 21 to 60.

"We received 27 phone calls from interested persons who said they'd read the article," he reports. "Our main office in the World Trade Center also received inquiries.

After careful investigation of both the physical attributes of the houses and the personalities of the proposed foster parents, the MPU has determined 15 of the 27 homes offered to be appropriate as foster homes.

"That number is unusually high," says Cook, adding that 30 calls to his office generally yield only 4 or 5 qualified caretakers.

Also unusual, according to Cook, was the fact that each caller specified that she wanted to take in an older resident, rather than a child.

residents.

Those still needing placement are classified in the mild to moderate range of retardation and can communicate, have self-help skills, understand simple directions and can perform jobs with supervision.

As part of its responsibility, the MPU must see to it that ex-residents receive six hours of programmed activities daily, provide transportation to and from same, supply a clothing allowance, assure visits from social workers and

assume the cost of medical care.

So far, the MPU has been able to match-up seven residents with homes located as a result of the Advance article. Residents have already begun pre-placement visits and one has even slept over-night in what she hopes will eventually be her foster home.

Cook's office is presently attempting to find match-ups for the other eight proposed caretakers and hopes to have all 15 houses certified within the next six weeks.