

Budget cuts could threaten Willowbrook release plan

By SYDNEY FREEDBERG

Hundreds of programs across New York State that aid the handicapped, including two on Staten Island, are bracing themselves for severe service reductions following a round of budget cuts imposed by a state agency June 1.

The directors of the two non-profit organizations here receiving funds from the state Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) said yesterday their day workshops for the handicapped will be cut back drastically if the state Legislature fails to restore a 30 per cent slash in their operating budgets.

The directors of the two groups — Staten Island Aid for Retarded Children and the United Cerebral Palsy's Staten Island center — predicted the contemplated and imposed reductions jeopardize the amount, quality and scope of day care now given to some 120 developmentally disabled Islanders.

The entire handicapped community, according to the directors, will feel the impact of the cuts. But, they said, OVR-funded mental retardation facilities will be hit the hardest.

Howard Berger, director of operations for the state rehabilitation office, said hundreds of OVR-funded agencies statewide have been informed of the following cutbacks:

☐ A 15 per cent across-the-board reduction in case service payments to all OVR-sponsored agencies serving the developmentally as well as physically handicapped — effective June 1.

☐ Beginning Oct. 1, a permanent 10 per cent reduction in case service payments for programs aiding mentally retarded clients.

In addition, Berger said, Staten Island Aid's workshop at 550 Bay St., Stapleton, and the palsy group's program at 296 Richmond Ave., Port Richmond, are among the facilities to sustain the following:

☐ A 29 per cent cut in OVR staffing grants that could result in a reduction of professional workers at the affected facilities.

☐ A reduction of so-called sheltered

employment support from \$1,000 a client a year to \$840. This means less money to mentally retarded persons able to undertake job responsibilities.

☐ A reduction of OVR-funded voca-

tional evaluation from seven weeks of paid evaluation to five weeks.

☐ A reduction of OVR-funded adjust-

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James Fasciani, an instructor at Staten Island Aid for Retarded Children's Stapleton workshop, teaches a client how to assemble a pen as part of a state-funded training program endangered by budget cuts.

S.I. Advance Photo by Robert Parsons



Two clients complete their sheltered employment support training by packaging the ball point pens in groups of 12.

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ment training programs from 45 weeks to 39 weeks.

Berger estimated the statewide rehabilitation program cuts total \$2.4 million, but he added that other OVR-sponsored services, including college occupational training programs and the like, also will be reduced in fiscal 1978.

Joan Hodum, executive director of Staten Island Aid, anticipated the reductions not only will have an impact on community-based day workshops but will affect general care of the handicapped.

She explained, for instance, that residents of group homes or foster homes are required to be engaged in a day care program, six hours a day, five days a week. "If the cuts are not restored," she said, "it will be impossible for us to accommodate the growing numbers in such residential programs."

The Willowbrook Developmental Center, Mrs. Hodum pointed out, is

under a court order to reduce its population from 2,500 to 250 in 1981. "That is why we were relying on more OVR money for support programs, not less," she said.

"In a time that deinstitutionalization is being stressed," Vincent Scalfani, director of Port Richmond's UCP satellite, contended, "these cuts seem rather inconsistent."

Of the 100 clients the Island's UCP center serves, approximately 75 are affected directly by state rehabilitation office funding, he said.

If the \$5-million shortfall in the OVR budget is not restored by the Legislature, Scalfani said, it would be virtually impossible for a retarded person to find a place in any rehabilitation day facility. "We have a waiting list now," he said, "and there would be no hope for ours or any other program."

Berger said the state office is "hoping and praying" the Legislature will approve a supplemental budget of ap-

proximately \$1.6 million so that rehabilitation facilities can be maintained at current levels.

The directors of workshops for the handicapped throughout New York State, including the two on the Island, plan to conduct a demonstration in front of Albany's state Department of Education building to protest the budget reductions. The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation is part of the department.