

UCP

United Cerebral Palsy Association of New York, with the Willowbrook project budgeted for millions, wants to prove a point, though its executives are squirmish about comparisons between private and public care.

The group's connection to Willowbrook stemmed from a 1975 contract to train state workers through a "mini-team" approach in the art of complicated therapy techniques.

Now that little contract has led to an unprecedented surrender of state business to more than 1,000 privately hired employees.

UCP has begun to operate seven center buildings, with 640 residents mostly children, and will attempt, it says, to get them to be active and involved people.

But an adversarial relationship already exists between UCP and the state over the private group's boisterous proclamations that it will succeed where the state has failed.

And the public workers, clearly, have nothing good to say about their successor for the deal is resulting in the dislodging of 600 state employees, and even possible layoffs.

In addition, there are already signs that UCP, which must, like the state, become a defendant in the federal court case, will refuse to be bullied into strict compliance with the mandated community placement timetable.

A new party to the consent decree, it remains to be seen how much the private organization will buckle under to the courts, or if it will, instead, choose to operate as an island smack in the middle of state grounds.

Most important, it remains to be seen if this somewhat amorphous, unproved notion of a private takeover will work, and the answer to that will be measured in terms of human lives, not in numbers games or in weight of papers amassed on some Albany administrator's desk.

Each and everyone of the 2,380 residents at Willowbrook will benefit in some way from this takeover, we've been told.

Some of the improvements will be measured in inches, others in feet. Programs throughout the institution will pick up, and each resident shall have a right to grow to his potential.

And then, and only then, will the cast of players in this dense Willowbrook saga be able to smile and say with a clear conscience, "The years of fighting were worth it."