

# Staten Island Advance

Staten Island, N. Y. Monday, November 14, 1977

## Community centers next 'logical step' in state planning for Willowbrook

By SYDNEY FRIEDBERG

Willowbrook Developmental Center, just four years ago the largest institution in the world with 6,300 people, is taking a giant step toward closing down.

By 1981, according to an ambitious state plan, Willowbrook will consist of a 250-bed home for the mentally retarded and three community-based support centers for handicapped Staten Islanders.

Administrators say they are not abandoning the work that still needs to be done "in-house" — for the 1,700 people from the five boroughs still residing at Willowbrook.

But they say their proposal, calling

for a major re-direction of past efforts, necessarily shifts the emphasis to the institution's future as an intermediate-sized facility serving only persons of Island origin.

"The process of normalizing our clients has been a long and tedious effort," the proposal says. "However, we have reached the crossroads of either completing this process or halting the logical progression, and keeping our clients solely dependent upon the institution."

The proposal also states that the next "logical step" in the chain of "normalization" is to place clients out in the community in sheltered-workshops or

other supportive services designed to increase self-independence.

In 1975, in response to a lawsuit that successfully challenged the warehousing care at the massive institution, Willowbrook was mandated by a federal court to begin the arduous task of developing less-restrictive settings for the retarded to live.

Since that time, hundreds of residents have been transferred to group and foster homes, but the development of day-time support services has lagged, mental health providers say.

Under the community services plan that has been disclosed, Willowbrook

(Continued on Page 2)

Page 1 of 2 Pages

# Community centers next 'logical' step for state planning for Willowbrook

(From Page 1)

would decentralize and attempt to enrich such back-up services, locating them in three facilities within each community board district on Staten Island.

The proposal, according to state officials, would bring programs within access to 450 clients from Willowbrook who have returned to their native Staten Island or adjacent New Jersey communities.

In addition, the state services would be made available to retarded persons who have never been institutionalized — people living in Island homes who have never gained access to the relatives few private programs in operation here.

According to Charles Korner, Willowbrook's coordinator of community services, staff would be re-assigned from the institution to the community workshops in numbers proportionate to the number of clients residing within each board district.

In the Community Board 1 area, Korner confirmed, state administrators hope to lease the building that once housed the Garber brothers department store, which, with 30,000 square feet of space, could be a dual-purposed facility.

For one, the site, located at 281 Richmond Ave., Port Richmond, could provide services for an estimated 280 clients residing in North Richmond. Secondly, administrators say, there would be space to expand training programs for additional numbers of still-institutionalized people being readied for community placement.

The Garber proposal needs the ap-

proval of the state's Metropolitan Placement Unit; before leasing negotiations can begin with the site's owners, who include Paul and Murray Garber.

Administrators point out that the approval is expected, and Cora Hoffman, a spokesman for the state's Acting Mental Retardation Commissioner Thomas A. Coughlin, has stated that although the cost of renting the site would be "substantial," it would not be prohibitive.

The Board 2 area, having within its boundaries 38 former Willowbrook residents, also would have a day center under the decentralization plan.

Although a site has not been selected, Korner said, the place chosen would not only house a workshop for retarded persons but all central administrative and support services staff as well.

In the South Richmond area that composes Community Board 3, an unidentified location would serve as a similar facility, providing programs to 87 clients formerly from Willowbrook and an unspecified number of non-institutionalized Staten Islanders, the proposal states.

James Walsh, an administrator at Willowbrook, says that the proposal must be approved by the Staten Island Regional Council on Developmental Dis-

abilities and the Department of Mental Hygiene.

In addition, Walsh said, meetings are to be arranged with Community Boards 2 and 3 to discuss the provisions of the plan.

Community Board 1 has already been approached about the Garber site, and although there was "some confusion," as Walsh put it, Willowbrook intends to press ahead.

"It's all in the initial phases," Walsh explained, "and we haven't gotten to the point of appointing staff or anything." He added, however, that many state employees look forward to the opportunity of being shifted to community workshop jobs.

And Korner added: "At this point this plan is really our highest priority. We have to respond to the needs of our clients by providing opportunities for Staten Island day programs.

Focusing too much on the "institution," Korner said, is equivalent to staying "behind the times. Clients are beginning to live in the community, and we have to move services closer to them."

Walsh said that Willowbrook hopes to "move as quickly as we can" on the proposal, adding that an attempt will be made to begin the transition and decentralization of services by next spring.