

# UCP admits quietly moving residents out of Willowbrook

By SYDNEY FREEDBERG

The United Cerebral Palsy Association of New York acknowledged yesterday that it has set up about a half-dozen apartments on Staten Island for 20 disabled people without officially informing other agencies for the handicapped.

Robert Schonhorn, executive director of UCP, apologized for the "mistake," telling Staten Island Regional Retardation and Disabilities Council members formally yesterday of an "exodus drive" begun last year to get retarded

residents of Willowbrook Developmental Center's UCP unit back to their home communities.

But Schonhorn was angered when some council members at yesterday's meeting of the group implied that UCP had an obligation to discuss its post-institutional training program with Staten Island's three community boards.

"Can you stop me from moving on to Staten Island if I want to?" Schonhorn asked. "I thought the whole idea is to get the people back to live as normal a life as possible, and not to have to check with anybody."

The apartments, scattered throughout the Island from Mariners Harbor to Tot-

tenville, each house two or three former Willowbrook residents and a homemaker. They are certified as foster-home settings, not group homes, which generally house 10 people. Establishment of group homes is discussed and channeled through community boards, while setup of foster homes is not.

Nevertheless, Beatrice Victor, director of the Island's first group home in Mariners Harbor, told of her sorry, 3½-year struggle to get the residence opened over the chants and hollers of a resistant community.

"We worked very, very hard to gain the community's support," she assert-

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ed. "We never got 100 percent on our side, but we did get them to trust us.

"But now, if you just go renting out apartments," she told Schonhorn, "we're (the council) going to lose our credibility."

Elin M. Howe, Willowbrook's director, questioned the "appropriateness" of having six of the 20 persons placed by UCP in Staten Island apartments, on the grounds that they really haven't been repatriated since they were not born here.

But Schonhorn, disagreeing, responded: "John Doe is in his late '60s. He's been on Staten Island for 28 years living at Willowbrook.

"He was born in Nassau County (L.I.), but he knows no one there. He feels lonely when he's not around here.

"Should we separate John from his borough," Schonhorn asked, "or should we make the mistake of sending him back to Nassau County where no one is waiting for him?"

Ms. Howe, a Staten Islander, responded that "the Island is not that big a place" and "I have to go out to the (community) boards and justify to them that the people living next door to them aren't really Staten Islanders."

The placement of non-Staten Islanders, Ms. Howe maintained, "should not become our priority."

The controversy over UCP's deinstitutionalization program spurred some

council members into thinking that a re-examination of the private and voluntary agencies' relationship with the community boards might be in order.

Saying that "100 percent of the community is never going to approve of any proposal," Ms. Howe suggested that "maybe we should just go through the motions and after a reasonable time just tell them we're moving in."

But a "communication system" is needed, said Dr. Gerald Spielman of the Staten Island Council on Developmental Disabilities, "because if you tell them (community board) after the fact, you're just creating more problems."

Schonhorn promised council chairman Dom Pirraglia that all future UCP-planned programs would be discussed with regional council members before they are initiated.

But he pointed out that the foster-care effort, to be completed by the end of the month, is working out well, with 83 mostly moderately retarded people placed in apartments throughout the city and receiving the benefits of full-day programs, recreational and medical services.

The residences, costing an average of \$440 a month, are paid by a combination of state and federal funds, Schonhorn said. He estimated the cost of patient care at approximately \$11,500 a year, compared to \$30,000 a year in the UCP-run buildings at Willowbrook.

In other business, the council voted to begin meetings of the Borough Developmental Services Office board April 5, despite lack of formal agreement for operation of the new agency.

The borough office, an arm of the state Department of Mental Hygiene, will coordinate all services for the developmentally disabled, in and out of institutions, on Staten Island.

The office's director is Ms. Howe, who will be paid, and the chairman is Pirraglia, who will not be.

Each borough was mandated under court order to have set up a services office by last October. But bureaucratic wrangling between the city and the state over terms of the agreement has delayed implementation.

The office, a consortium of consumers, voluntary providers and government agencies, is seen as a way to give localities further control over which programs for the handicapped receive funding.

Also at yesterday's council meeting, conducted in Willowbrook's administration building, Sonia Braniff, representing the Community School Board, announced plans for a symposium on the "Rights of the Handicapped," to be held April 15 at Wagner College.

The next council meeting, April 28 at 9:30 a.m., will be conducted in Willowbrook's Building 1. The public is invited to attend.