

# Island quota from Willowbrook to exceed 500

By SYDNEY FREEDBERG

When the court-mandated emptying of Staten Island Developmental Center is completed, more than 500 of the institution's mentally retarded residents — about 10 percent of the center's total in 1972 — will have been absorbed here.

Since 1972, according to state figures, the Willowbrook center has discharged 336 retarded individuals to the Staten Island community. Of these, the lion's share was adopted by families on the North Shore — families paid by the state to care for the individuals.

A few have gone to a group home in Mariners Harbor, and by the end of April, 20 residents will have been discharged to eight apartments scattered across the Island, housing two or three retarded persons and a live-in homemaker.

Of the 2,200 persons remaining in the institution's public and privately run facilities, state officials estimate that 170 are Staten Islanders due to return to the area encompassed by Community Boards 2 and 3.

In addition, according to Betsy Crowell, a spokesman for the state Metropolitan Placement Unit, the Island may end up accepting two or three dozen more retarded persons who have no ties to any other community.

While no state policy governs community placement of the "no-ties people," Ms. Crowell says that the estimated 300 orphans at the center will be returned "equitably" throughout New York City, so as to avoid "dumping" in any one borough.

"We're trying to create the most normal situation possible," Ms. Crowell explains, "and it wouldn't be normal at all if we decided to saturate any borough."

Ultimately, she says, the number of non-Staten Islanders placed here will depend on the types of residences available, matched to the needs of the individual.

Ms. Crowell also says that the retarded Islanders yet to be repatriated are by and large "extremely disabled individuals with an array of multi-handicapping conditions."

Whereas the "creme de la creme," as she calls the higher-functioning residents, has been able to grow in less-structured foster homes, those retarded persons now being discharged require "highly specialized" community settings.

The trend, according to Ms. Crowell, appears to be toward group homes, generally housing eight or more persons.

Indeed, state officials have established a wide variety of community facilities during their deinstitutionalization drive, which will likely last into the 1980s or until the institution's population is reduced to 250 Staten Island residents.

So-called family-care placements — that is the return of retarded persons to natural or adoptive parents as well as the setup of apartments with trained caseworkers — do not require approval by local governing boards.

Ms. Crowell and other state officials maintain, and the courts have upheld, retarded individuals' right to privacy

and equal protection under law.

So, to tell a community board each time a retarded person moves into an apartment house or a two-family home would be discriminatory under prevailing court view, they say.

But the establishment of what the state calls "community residences" — places housing more than four persons and known as group homes — clearly is a different story. All agree such facilities could change the complexion of a neighborhood, so communities should be informed before they are licensed.

A bill in Albany sponsored by State Sen. Frank Padavan, the Queens Republican who chairs the Senate's Mental Health Committee, would "upgrade" state policy regarding the setup of community residences by giving it the binding force of law.

Under Padavan's bill, local governing boards must be told of community residences' site selections more than a month before the state is granted an operating license for the facility.

The bill outlines clearly defined procedures for the selection of community residences by local communities to avoid "disproportionate distribution" of such facilities.

A spokesman for Padavan, Michael Fox, said that the bill, which has not been sponsored in the Assembly yet, recognizes disabled persons' right to attain benefits of normal residential environments, while taking into consideration the community's right to challenge site selection.

For their part, mental hygiene agency officials say they adhere to the procedures outlined in the Padavan bill, although they admit they reserve the option of going ahead with a project even if area residents are opposed.