

# Better care for retarded stressed at hearing on proposed new center

By DOUGLAS PATRICK

A Staten Island Developmental Center proposal to use a portion of the Nelson Terrace, a catering hall in Great Kills, was formally unveiled last night at a Community Board 3 hearing and many speakers sounded a new theme — better care for the mentally retarded.

More than 30 people attended the hearing in the Nelson Terrace, 23 Nelson Ave., and a majority expressed concern — not over possible adverse effects the center might have on the surrounding community — but over the extent of its outreach in the community and the quality of care it would provide.

Elin Howe, director of the Willowbrook center, was asked by several speakers for her assurance that all those residents with retarded children, whether they have been institutionalized or not — be offered equal and effective treatment.

In her introductory presentation, Miss Howe emphasized the proposed center would serve a maximum of 200 persons, dispense no drugs or medicine, nor house any staff or clients.

She also stressed the center would be primarily for residents of the Community Board 3 area and it was here that residents pressed her later during a question and answer period.

"We want to let board members know that if the center is going to come into the community, then we want the center to care for all those residents with retarded children," Paul Merrill, a member of Concerned Parents of the Retarded, said.

He explained that as a parent with a retarded child he had been denied assistance from the Willowbrook center because he was the natural father of a child who had never been institutionalized and therefore never had qualified for equal state aid.

"My wife and I do all we can for our child, but sometimes it's very hard on us and we need help," he said, adding the state has previously provided only false hopes of aid.

While criticizing the Willowbrook center and the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, Merrill said he supported the proposed center if it provided care for all, as much as an individual case would allow.

A woman who has had three children at the Island developmental center said her children were traumatized each time they had to return to the institution for counseling and she urged the board's support for the proposed community center.

Elin Howe said "The whole focus of our movement is for the benefit of Staten Island residents who have been insti-

tionalized. By law, we are obliged to give them priority placement in our program here."

Charles Korner, a Willowbrook staffer who will head the proposed Great Kills service center, gave a factual rundown of the day-program facility.

He said the center will have 17 staff members, including a supervising social worker, a psychologist, a community mental health nurse, a speech and hearing therapist, a senior recreational therapist, five social workers, five clerks, an administrator and a supervisor.

He said the program would provide case management supervision for each client placed in the community and small group therapy sessions for more independent clients who are learning basic homemaking and money management skills.

Under questioning, Korner said only four clients a day would appear for therapy in the office. He added this was a monthly average and could rise to up to eight clients each day.

Korner explained that 50 percent of the clients would not be able to travel to the center, while the other half would use the center only once a month. Those homebound patients will be treated by case workers based in the Great Kills center.

Among those clients who may be relocated into family-care and group homes within the Community Board 3 area, which encompasses most of the South Shore, are 50 people with current family ties on Staten Island and 65 people without family ties. There are 85 clients who have been already relocated and are receiving care in their homes.

Willowbrook is under court order to depopulate the center, whose patient load is approximately 1,600, to 250 Staten Island residents by 1981. According to Miss Howe, most of the clients who would use the service center are mildly retarded.

Frank Beraud, Community Board 3 chairman, expressed reservations over the number of non-community residents who would be served at the proposed center.

He said that since Community Board 3 only made up 4 percent of the city's population and there were about 600 homeless center residents, the board may end up absorbing a disproportionate share of clients.

Miss Howe countered: "It's a rough ballpark figure. It's the maximum number of clients who might use the center. Other parts of the city are already saturated with similar services and we want to avoid this as much as possible."