

New programs urged for retarded

Dr. Earl E. Balthazar, director of Behavioral Research for the state of Wisconsin and a prominent figure in the field of mental retardation, told about 100 Staten Island Developmental Center therapists yesterday that their greatest challenge is to continue "innovative program development" for the profoundly retarded rather than simply providing "custodial services" in the face of ever-decreasing research budgets.

Speaking at the Institute for Basic Research in Willowbrook, Dr. Balthazar, whose formulation of the Balthazar Scales for Development is considered a milestone in the field of mental retardation research, said that while there has been some great progress since 1950, such as programs like the Special Olympics, "there is still a great deal of room for improvement."

Citing widespread reductions across the country in funding for work with the profoundly retarded, Dr. Balthazar said: "We must organize our initiative and organize it well. We are being shaped by public policy, and public policy is not always consistent with human needs."

Dr. Balthazar added that in relegating therapists to simply custodial status, public policy is inhibiting the development and growth of the retarded and emotionally disturbed.

"The reality of numbers is always with us," Dr. Balthazar said, "and when the needs and requirements of the group are given priority, the individual is not trained to act upon his or her own needs."

Following Dr. Balthazar's lecture, titled "Emotional Disturbance in the Mentally Retarded," questions were taken from the audience, some of whom had journeyed from Queens and Manhattan centers for the seminar.

Dr. Balthazar's seminar was delivered under a recently formed program at the Staten Island Developmental Center titled Reduction of Behavioral Difficulties. The program will provide the center's staffers who work with the emotionally disturbed several prominent lecturers each year, according to program coordinator Dr. Manny Sternlicht.