

Center for day care opens at Willowbrook

The Staten Island Developmental Center yesterday held a formal opening for its drop-in/respite care center, a new concept in care for developmentally disabled children now living at home in the community.

The center is in a house on the rear portion of the sprawling Willowbrook grounds in what was formerly a residence for physicians. Some of the former doctors' residences have already been converted into living quarters for the retarded.

The drop-in/respite care center has been open for a month and has provided service for more than a dozen Staten Island youths. "Things have gone along smoothly," said Martin Roth, director of the program.

Roth explained that the program has two purposes. The first is to provide drop-in or day care for children whose parents have activities, like shopping or doctors' visits, during the day. The day care center is open Thursday to Monday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The second phase of the program is respite care which offers parents the opportunity to leave their child at the center for up to 30 days at a time. The respite care can be used if the parent has a vacation scheduled or if an emergency arises.

Since the state halted admissions to and is reducing the populations of its developmental centers, there has been an effort to provide services like respite care to make it easier for parents to care their disabled children at home.

Roth estimated that there are 224 persons living in the Staten Island community who would be eligible for the drop-in respite care.



Anthony McNee is the center of attention here as Martin Roth, in black jacket, Aldo Benedetto, assistant to the borough president, far left, and others look on.

S.I. Advance Photo by Frank J. Johns

In the past respite care was available at the center but most parents were reluctant to bring their children to stay in the large, often dehumanizing wards of the former Willowbrook State School.

"Once parents get past the front gate," Roth said, "and they see the home-like

atmosphere at this house they are not afraid to leave their children."

Roth said parents have been pleased with the care thus far, a fact he credited to the eight staffers who handle the children.

State officials had proposed earlier

this year that a home on Diana Trail, Emerson Hill, be used for respite care. The home is still owned by the state, but Roth said he did not know if it, too, would be used. Elin Howe, director of the center, could not be reached for comment.