

Group home employee training expanded

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ALBANY — State officials announced yesterday an expansion of the training programs designed to prepare employees at state developmental centers to work at group homes for the retarded.

The expanded program is planned for the state's 20 developmental centers, including the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook. The Island center is under a court decree to virtually shut down by April 1981.

Myer Frucher, director of the state Office of Employee Relations, said the program, to be funded by a \$3,000 grant and \$900,000 in expected federal funds, is being implemented to honor a state pledge not to lay off developmental center workers as a result of the state's deinstitutionalization policy. The residential population at state developmental centers has dropped from 25,827 to 14,418 in the last 10 years and is expected to drop even more in coming months.

"These are our most important people," said Frucher of the state's 17,000 therapy aides. "They are the frontline people in our system who provide the

day-to-day care and we feel a responsibility to them."

State officials said that more than 100 Staten Island Developmental Center employees have already participated in programs designed to prepare them to work in group homes and other community residences. About 20 are now working in community facilities.

Elin Howe, director of the Willowbrook center, said that there "are different ways of doing things and different modalities" used at residential facilities.

"Even though they are excellent employees, it does take some retraining to prepare them to work in the community," she said.

The Island center now has about 3,100 employees and 4,000 residents. The center's population is sched-

uled to drop to 250 next year, meaning that many of the employees will have to find alternative work.

"We'd like the employees to follow the clients into the community, which this program will enable us to do," said William McGeeen, president of the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA) which represents the 17,000 therapy aides.

The program was worked out by a joint labor-management committee. Felton King, president of the CSEA chapter at Staten Island Developmental Center, was among three union representatives on the committee.

About 2,000 developmental center workers statewide are expected to participate in the expanded program.