

# Child care: Residential movement grows — so does debate

After a decade of trial and error, community-based rather than institutional care for children, the mentally ill and the mentally retarded is here to stay.

The group homes, as the community facilities are called, continue to generate debate.

There is resistance from prospective neighbors, who feel threatened by the "different" people whom society once hid behind the locked doors of institutions.

And there is disagreement among professionals over the ideal size for a group home, with some experts arguing that the three-bed facilities currently favored are not appropriate for the disabled who need constant medical attention.

But the group home system has grown in sophistication and size to serve thousands of people throughout the state. The system has too much momentum to be rolled back, and the emphasis now is on perfecting it.

Professionals advise wary communities that instead of harboring the unrealistic hope that the advent of a group home can be blocked, they should get involved to ensure a good facility.

Staff often complain that the facilities are misunderstood because no one comes to visit. Yet participation from outsiders is encouraged by the private and state agencies that run group homes. Isolation runs counter to the concept of "normalization" that gave rise to group homes and made institutions increasingly obsolete.

The largest voluntary facility for delinquent and homeless children on Staten Island is the Mission of the Immaculate Virgin at Mount Loretto in Pleasant Plains. A 500-acre facility, it houses more than 350 children and sponsors six local group homes.

Private, non-profit agencies sponsor many group homes and day programs for the retarded. Unlike the state group homes, which take clients from the institutional system, the private agencies accept people who have never been institutionalized and whose families may no longer be able to care for them.

Agencies operating in the borough include: Volunteers of America in Mariners Harbor; United Cerebral Palsy of New York City in Port Richmond; United Cerebral Palsy Associations of New York State in Willowbrook; Association for the Help of Retarded Children in New Brighton and Willowbrook; Staten Island Aid to Retarded Children, and Association for Children with Retarded Mental Development in Willowbrook.

Other child-care services on Staten Island include:

Residences sponsored by the Children's Aid Society at Goodhue Community Center on a 42-acre site in New Brighton. The center offers family counseling, tutorial programs for students and a wide range of recreational activities and facilities, including a pool.

About a dozen group homes sponsored by the Catholic Guardian Society. The homes care for more than 100 children from 6 to 18 years old. The society receives funding from Catholic Charities and the city.

The Staten Island Services of New York Foundling Hospital, which sponsors four group homes and a reception center in Concord for up to 20 children. The children, from 6 to 18, reside in the center until foster homes can be found. The service also refers families for counseling.

Three group homes for girls, aged 14 to 17 operated by the state Division for Youth. The division

also has a short-stay center in Willowbrook.

Poster boarding, adoptive and daycare services operated by the Society for Seamen's Children, a 132-year-old facility at 26 Bay St., St. George.

The city Department of Social Services operates a group home for socially troubled adolescent girls on Market St., West Brighton.

The Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services, formerly the Jewish Board of Guardians, operates Geller House In-Arrochar, a short-term residential and diagnostic center for adolescents on remand from family court.

The board also sponsors the Staten Island Counseling Center, 3974 Amboy Rd., Great Kills. The center offers mental health services for children and an attempt is made to draw families into the treatment process. Anyone is welcome to drop in.