

Does UCP overregulate lives of patients in group homes?

By ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS

On the stark, socially isolated wards of the state institution in Willoughby, Mitchell was known as a hyperactive fire-setter and troublemaker who could barely care for himself.

Today he is thriving in a group home for the mentally retarded operated by United Cerebral Palsy Associations of New York State, a private charitable agency. At age 25, he lives in a pleasant highrise apartment building in Manhattan where he tends a tank of tropical fish, cooks his own meals, and rides a city bus to a vocational training center.

If Mitchell's story is any mea-

sure, the court-ordered program to move the retarded into the community with help from agencies like United Cerebral Palsy is a success.

However, Mitchell's live-in counselor and other United Cerebral Palsy employees say the 89 apartments run by the agency in the five boroughs are mired in unnecessary restrictions. Success is possible, these critics say, only by breaking the rules.

The agency requires most of the mentally retarded clients to eat pre-packaged and delivered food, to ride in company vans and to buy clothing from the company store. Before clients can go to the movies or a restaurant on their own, their counselor must obtain permission from

the central office. Relationships that lead to sexual encounters are forbidden.

Health aides and counselors working in the apartments, who earn \$9,000 to \$10,000 a year, complain of a lack of training and support from the agency. A high turnover among employees has led the agency to replace most live-in counselors with three shifts of hourly workers daily, at increased expense.

UCP tries to dictate the whole lifestyle in the apartments, we might as well be in institutions," said a counselor who has been with the agency for five years.

Walter Rosenthal, a spokesman for United Cerebral Palsy, defended

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