



Residents of the Staten Island Developmental Center carefully give flowers in the greenhouse just the right amount of water. S.I. Advance Photos by Robert Parsons

"Call me Miss Aponte," says a chunky woman with tightly braided hair who is hosing down troughs in the greenhouse. Ella Curry, director of the Staten Island Developmental Center, has warned against publishing the full names of patients, and Miss Aponte prefers the bossy sound of her last name.

But Miss Aponte, 26 and moderately retarded, has failed community placement three times. A Willowbrook resident since age 9, she simply refuses to leave, saying, "I still have a lot to learn."

In the greenhouse, Miss Aponte has learned more than any other patient, and she is de-

lighted to be mistaken for a staff member.

While Miss Aponte has memorized plant names and watering schedules, other patients practice tasks for weeks or months. They learn to trickle water instead of dumping it, to put shards in the pots for drainage and to carry pots without dropping them.

Seven of the patients are not only mentally retarded but deaf or blind as well.

The greenhouse earns about \$50 a week selling house plants to employees of the Staten Island Developmental Center, according to Patricia Campanello, a staff member. The money, from poinsettias at Christmas or

lilies at Easter, is plowed back into the cost of seeds, fertilizer and other equipment, she said.

Despite the state's court-ordered commitment to integrate the retarded into the community, the greenhouse doesn't sell to outsiders. Some staff members said they would like to set up a roadside stand for traffic passing the institution on Victory Blvd.

"It's a marvelous idea," Dr. Curry said. "It might have a motivating effect as far as the clients are concerned."

But the director said she was not optimistic about putting the idea into practice. The state bureaucracy, she said, "has a lot of rules and regulations."