

# Wary neighbors changing minds on group homes

By ANNE FANCIULLO

The issue of siting group homes for the mentally retarded or physically disabled in residential areas has been known to turn normally mild-mannered homeowners into a legion of crusaders bent on preserving the value of their properties.

But does the presence of group homes really influence the resale value of houses surrounding them? The answer, according to several Staten Island real estate appraisers, a state-commissioned group home study and a sampling of borough homeowners

themselves, is decidedly no.

The Island is not unique in the problems faced by social services and state agencies which are turning away from institutional placement of the handicapped in favor of small group facilities in middle class neighborhoods — where they are usually unwelcome.

Although community boards have been given a greater role in determining where these homes may be sited, the situation often places board leaders in the position of trying to balance their responsibilities to disabled New

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Except for a small plaque near the front door, this group home for retarded adults in New Brighton is typical of other neighborhood homes. Homeowners who once protested its opening have come to co-exist happily with it.

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