

Awareness spurs support for homes

By DOUGLAS PATRICK

Although a proposed group home for the mentally retarded might still provoke opposition from the immediate community where it will be placed, community board officials agree that board members are much more inclined to support such a group home because of an increased awareness of the nature of mental retardation.

"It's been a process of education for the community boards,"

said Frank Beraud, district manager of Community Board 3.

"When the group homes for the mentally retarded first started coming before the community boards, board members did not know anything about mental retardation and many viewed it as a threat to a neighborhood," Beraud continued.

Lillian Prado, district manager of Community Board 2, agreed with Beraud's assessment. She also pointed out — like Beraud — that board

members are also aware now that these home are for mentally retarded people who have been born and raised on Staten Island.

"Before, some thought that Staten Island had to take care of a problem that was thrust upon them because the Staten Island Developmental Center in Wilbrook couldn't," Mrs. Prado said.

"Board members realize that many of these people are from our community," she said.

Last month, Community Board

3, which covers the Island's South Shore, voted unanimously to approve a proposed group home for the mentally retarded at 165-167 Dewey Ave. in Great Kills. "We were happy to approve it," said Beraud.

The group home will be operated by the Association for Children of Retarded Mental Development. Mickey Marlib, associate executive director of the association, attended the board



Every resident of the group home shares in household chores, including meal preparation.

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meeting and was heartened by the board's complete support.

"It was magnificent to see every board member raise their hand in support of the group home when the time came to vote on it," he said.

"That is a great group of people and I take my hat off to them," said Marlib, who has fought many battles in the past with community boards that were hostile to a proposed group home.

The association currently operates a group home at 630 Hylan Blvd., Grasmere, and a recent visit by an Advance reporter revealed a well-run program that provided its six residents with a real home.

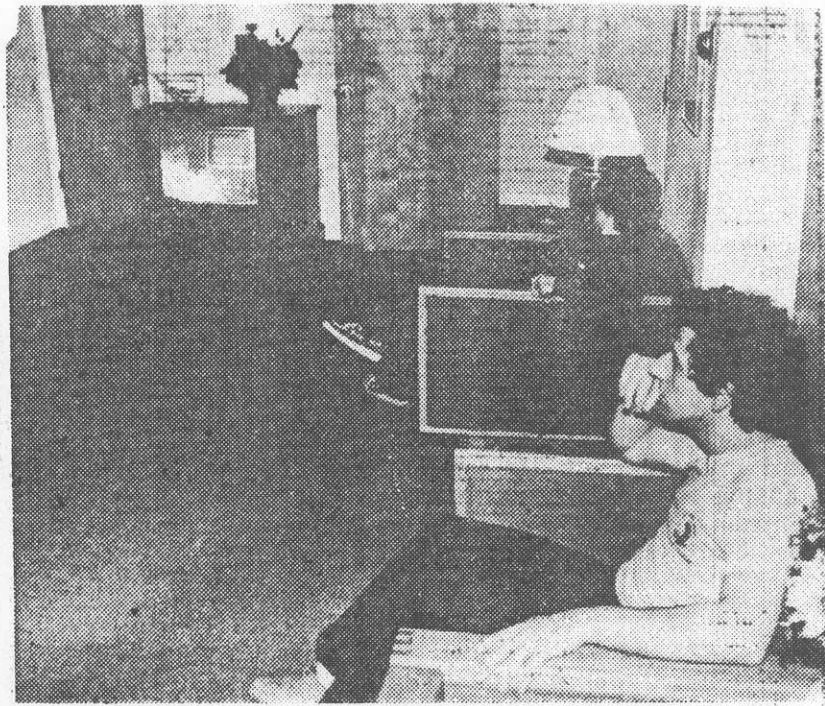
Mrs. Joanne Freid, manager of the home, said there are always at least two full-time counselors in the home at all times. There is also a cook, a housekeeper and a driver who takes the clients to their school in Brooklyn.

In addition, she said there is a team of backup professionals for the clients, which includes a nutritionist, a recreational therapist, a social worker, a psychologist, a nurse, and a doctor.

Mrs. Freid said that clients participate in the everyday operation of the house. "They are responsible for keeping their room clean, doing their own laundry, cooking, sewing, and helping to set and clear the table for dinner," she said.

"People don't realize that the mentally retarded have expectations for themselves like anyone else, and they feel frustrated that they cannot achieve those expectations without an uphill fight," Mrs. Fried said.

"Three of these clients came from the home of their parents on Staten Island and three came from Willowbrook," she said. "It is amazing the progress they can make once they get into this kind of environment," Mrs. Freid said.



The television room, like that in homes throughout the Island, is one of the most popular in the house.

S.I. Advance Photos by Robert Parsons

She recalled one client coming from Willowbrook whose records indicated that he was altogether "non-verbal," incapable of speech.

"He was in this home for one day and he started speaking," she said. "I couldn't believe it," she said. "I had seen him for several years at Willowbrook and he had never spoken a word."

But the problems are not over for group homes for the mentally retarded. Unlike group homes for troubled teen-agers or other kinds of homes, it is only the one for the mentally retarded that is required by law to come before a community board before it can be approved.

"It's very odd," said Beraud, "that these other kinds of group homes are not required by the law to come before us," he said. "Especially when you figure that a group home for troubled teen-agers might be a lot more

controversial than one for the mentally retarded."

Problems for the group homes for the mentally retarded have totally vanished, he said. There is a proposed group home for the retarded at 72 Ionia Ave., Annadale, and area residents have already indicated stiff opposition to the proposal.

Beraud said there will be a public hearing on the proposal Feb. 18 at 8 p.m. in the board office at the Factory Center in Princes Bay.

"The residents are very upset at the possibility of a group home, and some said they are considering legal action," he said.

The battle over group homes for the mentally retarded continues, but there are some board members who have recently switched sides and joined the supporters of the mentally retarded.

(This is the second of two parts:)

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Residents of a group home at 630 Hylan Blvd., Grasmere, do daily exercises in their finished basement.

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