

# Group homes: Alternatives to institutional care

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

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

Prospective neighbors resist, feeling threatened by the "different" people society once hid behind locked institutional doors.

Professionals disagree over the best size for a group home. Some worry that the three-bed facilities currently favored are not appropriate for the disabled who need constant medical attention.

The group home system has nonetheless grown to serve thousands of people throughout the state. The system has too much momentum to be reversed, and the focus now is on perfecting it.

Instead of hoping unrealistically that a group home can be blocked, professionals advise communities to get involved to insure a good facility.

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 300-acre facility, it houses some 250 children, and sponsors 8 local group homes. It also licenses and supervises foster boarding homes for 200 children.

The Children's Aid Society at Goodhue Community Center, a 42-acre site in New Brighton, also sponsors residences. The center offers family counseling, tutorial programs for students, and a wide range of recreational activities and facilities, including a pool. The society sponsors a summer day-camp at the center as well, the fee for which is calculated on a sliding scale.

Catholic Charities operates a counseling center in Port Richmond.

About a dozen homes are sponsored by the Catholic Guardian Society, which receives funding from Catholic Charities, the Greater New York Fund, and the city. The homes care for over 100 children ages 6 through 18.

The Catholic Home Bureau, which also receives funds from the Catholic Charities and the city, operates two group homes on Staten Island, and provides foster care for about 20 children.

The Staten Island Services of the New York Foundling Hospital sponsors four group homes throughout the Island, and a reception and diagnostic center in Concord. The center can house up to 20 children until foster homes can be found. The hospital supervises the foster homes, and also offers counseling.

The state Division for Youth operates two group homes, one for girls and one for boys aged 14 to 17. The division also has a short-stay center in Willowbrook for adolescents that have been ruled criminal or unmanageable by family court, and a counseling center in Stapleton.

The Society for Seamen's Children, a 136-year-old facility in St. George, provides adoption services, and also administers foster care. The Society provides family day care, and a Teen Advocacy program, which provides counseling and assistance to teenage girls that have become pregnant.

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 Madeline Borg Counseling Services center in Great Kills.

The Special Services for Children division of the Human Resources Administration, New York City, operates a group home for socially troubled adolescent girls in West Brighton, and investigates reports of child abuse and neglect through its Stapleton center. Referral services for adoption, foster care, child welfare, maternity shelter care and homemaking services are also provided at the Stapleton center.

United Cerebral Palsy of New York City, with administrative offices in Port Richmond, provides housing and care for severely and profoundly retarded and developmentally disabled persons that, by federal mandate, must be removed from institutional care. The Carl Warner facility, on the grounds of the Staten Island Developmental Center, provides care for 450 of the most severely retarded and disabled. The Nina Eaton center at the South Beach Psychiatric Center provides 55 less disabled persons with care. United Cerebral Palsy also runs 6 to 7 supportive apartments for more highly functioning individuals.

Staten Island Aid to Retarded children sponsors a school for some 30 retarded children aged 3 and up. Preschool children, between 3 and 5 years old, can be enrolled by their parents. Older children, however, are sent to the school after review by the New York City Committee on the Handicapped, where it is determined that they cannot be enrolled in a regular school.