

Mental retardation: Treatment improves

Treatment of the mentally retarded has come a long way since the infamous days of Willowbrook, just 10 years ago.

Litigation brought a federal court order in 1975. The Willowbrook State School, now renamed the Staten Island Developmental Center, was forced to correct the horror of days when patients roamed naked in a dirty and overcrowded institution.

Because of that precedent-setting court decision, called the Willowbrook Consent Decree, the emphasis of both government and private care of the mentally retarded has shifted from institutional warehousing to more intimate group homes in the community.

On Staten Island, a range of quality services for the mentally retarded are available. Some of the treatment, primarily in institutions, is intensive. But for the mildly or moderately retarded person who is capable of holding a job, there is also employment training and placement.

The borough's facilities to serve the mentally retarded and the physically disabled:

¶ Staten Island Developmental Center, 2760 Victory Blvd., Willowbrook, has a complex of buildings on a 382-acre site and is administered by the state. About 800 patients live here. On the same grounds is a 450-bed institution operated under a state contract by United Cerebral Palsy Associations of New York State, a private charitable agency. Because of the court decree, neither facility is accepting new admissions.

The developmental center does, however, offer a respite center, where parents from Staten Island may bring their retarded children for a few days, if they temporarily cannot be cared for at home.

¶ The Staten Island Borough Developmental Services Office, an arm of the state Office of

Mental Retardation, has a free information and referral service at 26 Dumont Ave., Dongan Hills. The phone number is 351-7701.

¶ Staten Island Aid for Retarded Children, based at 1150 Castleton Ave., West Brighton, provides a day training center with sheltered workshops and other social training, as well as sheltered workshops and other social training. It also operates group homes in Tottenville and Willowbrook.

¶ Staten Island Aid Rehabilitation Center, 215 Bay St., Tompkinsville, offers a sheltered workshop for adults.

¶ Staten Island Blind Society, 352 Nelson Ave., Great Kills, is a voluntary group meeting twice a month.

¶ The Downs Syndrome Foundation, 10 Joline Lane, Tottenville, is a school for children with Downs Syndrome, commonly known as mongolism.

¶ Job Path, 30 Bay St., St. George, a subsidiary of the Vera Institute of Justice, offers on-the-job training for the mentally retarded in such fields as janitorial, clerical and hospital orderly work.

¶ The Institute for Basic Research in Mental Retardation, 1050 Forest Hill Rd., Willowbrook, researches retardation and its causes.

¶ The Staten Island Chapter, Muscular Dystrophy Association, has a referral center at 78 Guyon Ave., Oakwood.

¶ United Cerebral Palsy of New York City runs a sheltered workshop for adolescents and adults at 296 Richmond Ave., Port Richmond.

¶ The Volunteers of America Care Facility operates a group home at the Arlington Terrace Apartments, Mariners Harbor, for 12 mentally retarded residents. It also operates seven apartments in a variety of locations for 12 adults.