

# Foster Grandparent group denied state grant renewal

By SHEILA CHASE

The federal volunteer agency, ACTION, has denied funding renewal for a Foster Grandparent Program administered by the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, Commissioner Zygmund L. Slezak, announced yesterday.

The 10-year-old grant, which pays about 570 senior citizen volunteers working with developmentally disabled children, lasts until the end of this month. There are 43 foster grandparents in the program managed through the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook.

By Feb. 28, the federal agency expects to have local sponsors to administer programs operating out of developmental centers throughout the state, Herbert Stupp, regional director for ACTION, said.

Stupp said the grant was not renewed for reasons that included lax reporting of spending of federal money; excessive administrative costs, which are covered by state money; a recent underexpenditure of federal grant money, and "unwarranted disturbing of foster grandparents over ACTION's intent with the plan of decentralization," occasions when sponsors were warned of impending sponsor changes and rallied to protest and appeal.

Two proposals for the Staten Island program are expected, he said. One of them is from the city's Department for the Aging, which currently administers a separate foster grandparent program in three other boroughs, and the other is from the administrator of the current Island program, Netty Evans, on behalf of the Borough Developmental Service Organization (BDSO).

Ms. Evans said the BDSO proposal, if granted in full, would leave grandparents at their current sites with all the benefits

given state employees. Benefits include time off, insurance and physical examinations.

The six volunteer stations, at which grandparents currently work, she said, have been informed of the administrative upheaval and have agreed to be named as part of the BDSO grant package.

Federal administrators, in a letter sent to each foster grandparent and signed by Deputy Director Betty Brake, said that each grandparent who was with the program as of Dec. 30 "is assured that the change of sponsorship will not affect his or her service opportunity."

Stupp said that grandparents are entitled, under ACTION guidelines, to two weeks' vacation, insurance and a physical examination, and benefits under any sponsor would be comparable to those given by the state.

A spokesman for OMRDD, William Knowlton, said he doubts that ACTION can guarantee positions to grandparents across the board. "All they can guarantee is a certain amount of money" already in the budget for the OMRDD grant, which amounts to \$1.2 million.

Knowlton added that the

distribution to local sponsors will separate the federal money from the larger state contribution, which has grown to twice the federal amount during the last 10 years. With combined funding sources the state also runs its own Senior Companion program, from which there are 10 volunteers at the Willowbrook facility.

Knowlton and Evans both said they do not know what will happen to that program. "But we'll search through the whole budget," released by the state yesterday, "to see what we can find in our own dwindling resources" to help the grandparents at each local site and to keep the senior companions in place.

The state has also encouraged developmental centers or agencies associated with them to apply for a local sponsorship grant. "In some rural areas," Knowlton said, "our facilities are the only ones that exist to support such a program."

The call for local sponsors comes after repeated indications during the last 10 months of ACTION's intent to decentralize administration of the OMRDD grant. It was most recently extended after a threatened Dec. 1 cutoff.