

Mentally handicapped: A helping hand is ready

A helping hand is readily available for Staten Islanders who are physically or mentally handicapped.

The Island is recognized throughout the state for its work with mentally retarded individuals, although that recognition has not always been positive.

This is the home of the former Willowbrook State School, once termed a "snake pit" by the late Robert F. Kennedy. Only a decade ago, the institution, which then housed more than 6,000 patients, was damned for its "caretaker" philosophy which allowed patients to roam naked in dirty and overcrowded buildings.

Storms of protest from the community and a flurry of lawsuits resulted in dramatic changes.

Willowbrook, since renamed the Staten Island Developmental Center, now houses only about 700 patients, and they are provided with training and support services. The grounds of SIDC include a respite center, where parents may bring their retarded children for a few days if they cannot be cared for at home; a drop-in center for retarded children, which operates 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. every day; and the Institute for Basic Research in Mental Retardation.

The SIDC is not accepting new admissions. For families or per-

sons that need information about services which are open for new clients, the first step might be contacting the Staten Island Developmental Services Office, 26 Dumont Ave., Dongan Hills. Operated by the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, the service will direct patients to appropriate agencies; call 351-7701 between 9 a.m. and noon, Monday through Friday.

Agencies which provide diagnostic, referral, residential and/or treatment services for the handicapped include:

- Association for Help of Retarded Children, which operates two group homes on Staten Is-

land: A group home for eight developmentally disabled adults on Tysen Street in West Brighton and another home for eight on the grounds of the Staten Island Developmental Center.

- Association for Advancement of Blind and Retarded in Dongan Hills houses eight adults who are blind and severely retarded.

- Child Study Center of New York, 1657 Victory Blvd., Castleton Corners. Works with children 2½ to 16 years who are learning disabled or have behavior disorders. A half-day program is open for pre-school children; a day program is for children ages 6 to 16. Affiliated

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