

UCP begins shifting Willowbrook operation to state

By JULIE MACK
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With no apparent problems, United Cerebral Palsy of New York State handed over the keys to Building 14 at the Karl D. Warner Center in Willowbrook at 6 a.m. yesterday, the first stage in transferring the Warner Center to state operation.

"There was the normal confusion, with people moving offices and things like that, but for the clients there was a minimum of disruption," Cora Hoffman, UCP assistant executive director, said. "I was over there and things seemed to be going as smoothly as could be expected."

The Warner Center is merging with the Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC) as part of an arrangement between UCP and the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) to help solve UCP's financial difficulties.

In a plan announced last week,

the state agreed to a retroactive rate increase in its contract with UCP, which has provided services for about 700 mentally retarded persons. The rate increase was necessary for UCP to pay off \$5 million in debts and to balance the budget on its current operation.

In exchange for the rate increase, the state asked UCP to relinquish control of the Warner Center, a 280-bed facility on the grounds of SIDC. UCP took over the Warner Center in 1977, at a time when the state was attempting to reduce SIDC's patient population.

According to the agreement signed by Judge John Bartels of U.S. District Court in Brooklyn, UCP will turn over the four residential buildings at Warner Center during the next four months. The next building will be transferred to state control on March 2. By May 2, the entire Warner Center will be operated by the Staten Island Developmental Center.

Also, as part of the agreement, the state agreed to hire most of the present Warner Center staff. It was that transition — moving persons from UCP employment to the state payroll — that caused the most headaches in yesterday's transfer, officials said. Because the agreement was only signed a week ago and announced to employees last weekend, officials had only three workdays to complete the paperwork on the first group of 130 employees involved in the transfer.

"It's been one rough week," Mrs. Hoffman said. "We've been

running from meeting to meeting trying to get it all resolved."

"Really, the only problem was maybe personnel," SIDC Director James Walsh said. "Everyone at Warner Center is concerned about their jobs and they have been asking a lot of questions."

Although the state agreed to keep the employees at the same salary, they lose seniority and may lose their jobs if scheduled layoffs at SIDC take place during the next few years.

There are also about 50 employees who are not assured that their positions will be kept by the state after the transition is finalized. Walsh said that all the direct care staff are assured jobs for at least six months, but people working in support services — such as secretaries — may be phased out. The state plans to give jobs to 340. The Warner Center had a staff of almost 500 at the beginning of the year.

Of those left without work at Warner, Mrs. Hoffman said that UCP will place some persons elsewhere in the agency, especially because UCP will now increase some of its community programs. Moreover, other voluntary agencies that work with the mentally retarded have been calling UCP in attempts to recruit personnel who are laid off

as a result of the transfer of the Warner Center, she said.

Some people — especially the professional staff — have simply resigned, Mrs. Hoffman said, viewing the transfer as a good time to take advantage of other job offers. She said attrition at the Warner Center has been running more than double the usual rate, with 40 resignations since January.

"I don't think there will be a problem," Mrs. Hoffman said.