

wide services. "But I should note that in this instance we were able to provide service when the need arose, and we're still working on the case."

Ms. Hawes acknowledged that Joey's present placement at the Willowbrook respite center is not ideal, and that he should be moved into permanent placement as soon as possible.

"But access to group homes is a difficult problem for everybody," she said. "There are not enough residential beds available for patients who need the service. We are opening beds as fast we can, but we can't open them as fast as people need them."

While everybody involved in the DeLillo case agrees that the shortage of residential beds is one barrier to Joey's permanent placement, advocates for the DeLillos perceive an additional barrier — the inaction of bureaucrats who are processing the case.

"Nobody wants to assume responsibility," said Jerry Teehan, member of the Staten Island Borough President's Commission on the Handicapped. "They want to pass the buck."

Teehan says the DeLillo case is symptomatic of the obstacles faced by parents in seeking service for handicapped children. "It takes a sophisticated, dynamic, intellectual and wise per-

son to know where to go for help," he says. "Most parents stumble around until someone notices them."

And once parents are put in touch with the right agencies, the families must live with decisions made by bureaucrats who may lack understanding of the family's situation, Teehan said.

"They decide for us and not with us. Rehabilitation is supposed to be an agreement between the client and the bureaucracy. Ideally, it's the setting of a goal," he says. "But more often than not, government agencies take a patriarchal attitude and just decide what they think is best."

Bureaucrats, not surprisingly, disagree.

"I don't see it in such conspiratorial terms," said William Combes, program coordinator for the state Commission on Quality of Care. "It's not so cut and dried."

"A lot of people need to be served and there are not a lot of places to serve them," he said. "And I don't think the system has too much flexibility — it's too strained."

Another issue is whether the service system for the handicapped has become too weighted and too complex, which unnecessarily slows down the decision-making process in situations like the DeLillos'.

Anne Seery, senior legislative aide to Assemblyman Robert Stranieri and one of the DeLillos' advocates, says she has been overwhelmed by the number of agencies and people associated with the DeLillo case.

"The red tape is a terrible problem," she said. "It's not the lack of concern, it's the sheer numbers which makes it so frustrating."

Ms. Hawes debates that point.

"I think in cases like the DeLillos', many people are working very hard to see that Joey has every opportunity," she said. "The officials are not working to make the process cumbersome."

Mary Jane Barnett, another OMRDD official working on the DeLillo case, said she does not see the DeLillos as victims of the system. "Mrs. DeLillo is not a victim," she said. "She is more a ship tossed around in the wind because of Joseph's problems."

But Teehan sees it differently.

"Damn right that kid's a victim of the system," he said. "And I don't believe this case is an exception. It may be in a minority, but it's not an exception."

"I'm not the only one," Mrs. DeLillo said. "There are a lot of kids who are just like Joey."

*(This is part three of a series. Tomorrow: Other kids like Joey, and the problem called 'aging out'.)*