

Give the retarded decent housing

Although I worked for nearly two decades on the campus of the Staten Island Developmental Center and I lived on the grounds, I did not find yet a single patient (now client) who wants to stay there. The brighter ones and those who cannot talk express themselves (by speech or body language) alike. They want to be "taken out," not for a dinner, but forever. The administration wants to force them into group homes from which they would see only the heavy traffic, but not feel a loving relationship with the neighborhood. Who cares about the clients' rights and wishes?

Clients learned from each other how to behave and survive. They were normalized on the premises, without realizing the change, which was slow. More than 90 percent of them are living, by now, in community care (group homes, family care, smaller institutions). Many became employees, are married and have normal children. All of them want to live incognito and not on the campus of SIDC, even if they work there.

At present, the remaining clients feel like Hansel and Gretel, although there are no witches in

the abandoned buildings, I guess, but for them it is frightening. It is the worst place to build group homes. Indeed, a home is a home only if it's cosy and surrounded by friendly surroundings. Tender loving care is not enough to prepare them for community living, nor the seeing of private houses and heavy traffic through the windows of the new group homes.

The modernized Richmond Complex is more than enough to take care of those 250 clients which will remain. The profoundly retarded with multiple handicaps should be transferred to smaller institutions with proper facilities.

In my neighborhood and St. George area, there are several group homes functioning in luxury apartments without any difficulty. Why not do the same with the rest of them, in their best interest, instead of building group homes in the wrongest place? No more mini-Willowbrooks, please.

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