

Mental retardation: Helping hands are there

Staten Island offers a wide range of services for the mentally handicapped.

Court-ordered changes in the operation of the Staten Island Developmental Center, once considered a textbook case in how not to deal with the mentally retarded, have helped the borough regain at least some of its reputation for showing compassion for the developmentally disabled.

At one time the borough was mainly known around the state as the home of SIDC, 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. However, the institution's quality of care is still debated, and the federal government recently announced its plan to cut off SIDC's federal Medicaid funds. The institution plans to appeal the decision.

SIDC is scheduled to close in 1987. Meanwhile, the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities continues to bolster an impressive array of agencies and organizations to serve the mentally retarded of all ages on Staten Island.

For those people, the grounds of SIDC house 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 which operates from 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 who need information about services that are open to new clients, the first step should be to contact the Staten Island Boro Develop-

mental Services Office, 26 Dumont Ave., Dongan Hills. The BDSO can provide families with case management, drop-in/respite services and home-maker services.

The office also houses an information and referral service which acts as a central directory of all services for the retarded on Staten Island. Its job is to match handicapped persons with appropriate services and programs.

For more information, call 351-7701 between 8:30 a.m. and noon Monday through Friday.

The following is a list of agencies which provide diagnostic, referral, residential and/or treatment services for Staten Island's mentally retarded and developmentally disabled:

- Association for Children with Retarded Mental Development operates a group home and a sheltered workshop for developmentally disabled adults. The agency can be reached at 356-8800.

- Association for the Help of Retarded Children operates two adult group homes and a Saturday recreation program for young adults. It maintains a parents' assistance committee. Phone (212) 254-8203.

- A Very Special Place, 241 New Dorp Lane, New Dorp, operates a day treatment program which includes clinical and support services for people ages 21 and over, and has a community center with a recreational/socialization program for ages 18 and over, with a special program for senior citizens. An additional day treatment program is proposed for this year and could start by June or July in Great Kills; applications are now being accepted. Phone 667-1050.

- Catholic Guardian Society operates a geriatric group home for the aged developmentally disabled. Phone 371-1000.

- Committee on the Handicapped (COH), a division of the city Board of Education, offers evaluation and school placement for children ages 3 to 21. Pro-

grams operated by COH include the Richmond Occupational Training in Clifton which provides educational and occupational training for developmentally and physically handicapped young adults ages 15½ to 21; and the Seaside School, based at South Beach Psychiatric Center, for autistic children ages 5 to 21. The agency can be reached at 987-1764.

- Down's Syndrome Learning Center provides infant stimulation and preschool programs for Down's Syndrome children. It also has a parents' support group. Phone 317-6277.

- Early Childhood Direction Center has an information and referral service, assistance and follow-up for handicapped children ages birth to 5. Phone 240-4600.

- Eden II School for Autistic Children provides classroom instruction, adaptive physical education, speech therapy, psychological and social services, parent training, a Saturday leisure-time training program and an adult training program. Phone 816-1422.

- Exceptional Children's Social Club has recreational activities including bowling, arts and crafts, and square dancing for ages 16 and over.

- North Richmond Community Mental Health Center Community Treatment Clinic, based at Bayley Seton Hospital, addresses mental health needs of mentally retarded persons ages 16 and over. Clients are seen individually and in group sessions. Phone 447-3010.

- On Your Mark is a therapeutic recreation program for developmentally disabled children ages 2½ years to young adult. Activities are scheduled after school, evenings and weekends. It also sponsors a summer camp called Camp Tikvah. Phone 981-1500.

- Our P.L.A.C.E. School has preschool programming for children ages 2 to 5 with special needs in language, speech, movement, hearing and vision and social adjustment services