

other developmental centers around the state and are awaiting placement in community residences. A good share of former SIDC residents — more than 2,800 — are already living in the community: Some returned to their families; others were placed in group homes, supervised apartments or "family care," which resembles foster care: a few, who it turned out never belonged in Willowbrook in the first place, are now living independently.

The state continues to move residents out of SIDC at a rapid pace — the institution should reach the 250 level by next April. It is scheduled to close in 1987, a decision inspired by the state's eagerness to close the book on Willowbrook. Webb says it proves the state is willing not only to abide by the consent decree, but to go beyond it.

"I think we've more than met the intent of the consent decree," he says.

Others debate that point —

they are upset about the state's attempts to amend the consent judgment so that "community residences" include facilities with as many as 50 beds. Presently, Willowbrook residents must be put into group homes with no more than 15 beds. Rob Levy, an NYCLU attorney, terms the state's proposal "a perversion of the idea of community placement."

Moreover, lawyers at the NYCLU and other advocates for the Willowbrook residents claim the quality of care at SIDC is still deficient and that the state should be placing residents into the community at a faster pace.

But despite the still-raging battles over implementation of the consent judgment, there is a general acknowledgement that the settlement marked a turning point in the state's care of its mentally retarded citizens.

"Without the consent decree, we would still be jerking around, acting like a big institutional system," Webb says.

"It's given the state some

goals; it's established standards," Levy said.

"That's the greatest success of the consent decree," says Chris Hansen, an NYCLU attorney who worked on the Willowbrook case from 1973 to 1983. "In 1972, the idea of community placement was a radical idea — we were the lone voices in the wilderness. I remember in 1975, there were parents who said 'over my dead body' would their children be taken from the institution and be placed in the community.

"The real triumph of Willowbrook is that it changed the view of how we should care for the mentally retarded. Today, we get guys like Jim Walsh (director of SIDC) talking about community placement, and I think that's terrific."

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*(This is the first in a six-part series on the Staten Island Developmental Center and what has happened since the consent decree was issued 10 years ago.)*