

Deinstitutionalization shift

Statistics compiled by New York State's Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities show that the number of retardates confined to institutions declined steadily from more than 20,000 in 1975 to about 10,000 this year. During that same period, the number of residents of group homes rose from 905 to 13,569.

However, two New York institutions are still vying for the dubious distinction of having the largest populations. These are the Wassaic Developmental Center in Dutchess County, with a current count of 1,295 residents, and the Letchworth Village Developmental Center in Rockland County, with 1,277 residents.

The trend toward deinstitutionalization also is evident in Connecticut and New Jersey, officials said.

In 1975, Connecticut had 405 retardates in community residences and 3,273 in institutions, according to John Ficarro, the director of information systems for the state's Department of Mental

Retardation. Today, there are 1,277 in group homes, 390 in supervised apartments, and 494 in "community training homes," Ficarro said. The latter category refers to a type of foster care involving no more than two residents, he explained.

The number of retardates institutionalized in Connecticut declined from 3,273 in 1975 to 2,408 in 1986, Ficarro said. The state's largest institution is the Southbury Training School, with 1,100 residents.

In New Jersey, there were only 700 retardates living in community residences in 1977, as opposed to 7,932 confined to institutions that year, the earliest date for which comparable statistics are available, according to a spokesman for the state's Department of Mental Retardation.

Today, New Jersey has 3,175 retardates in community residences and 5,490 in institutions. The state's largest institution is the Vineland Developmental Center, with 1,180 residents.

—Jack Leahy