

on ability to pay.

Respite guests will be supervised by trained AHRC staff during two shifts between 3 p.m., when borders will begin to return home after school and work, and 9 a.m.

"They (the staff) are the best of who we have," explained Mrs. DelBagno. "They are trained to give out medication, (trained in) first aid, and they have drivers' licenses."

Guests will be encouraged, but not required, to pitch in with household chores, such as setting the table, cleaning up and assisting in the kitchen, according to Laura Zuercher, who will manage the respite and heads up one of AHRC's two group homes.

Explained Fishman: "They will be taken care of professionally . . . but it will be a breaking point in terms of what it is like to be away from home . . . It will be an alternative living style, but it will be a homelike experience in the community."

While Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly said she was not aware of AHRC's respite home, she said respite facilities are "one area where we need help.

"I think it is desperately needed," said Mrs. Connelly, who chairs the Assembly's Committee on Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities. "As long as the building is kept up and it blends in with the community, it is a desperately needed component for the survival of a family with mentally retarded . . . And I know Mr. Fishman is truly dedicated."

The program has received a one-year grant of \$100,000 from the New York State Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, according to spokesman Lou Ganim.

While Fishman said the need for such a program on the Island is largely "unidentifiable," he and Mrs. DelBagno said the impetus to institute a respite house was based primarily on a waiting list

of 300 for entrance into an AHRC group home. "From that you can draw a parallel need," said Fishman.

"There is a large community of developmentally disabled and mentally retarded on Staten Island," he continued. "We believe we will have it (the respite house) utilized at a high rate."

The Staten Island Developmentally Disabled Services Office has pegged the number of mentally retarded people on Staten Island at 6,000, according to director Robert Witkowsky. He said about 2,500 mentally retarded take advantage of services offered on the Island.

While there is the possibility of a disparity in ages among respite guests at any given time, organizers say that won't present a problem.

"There will be a great deal of nurturing," said Mrs. Zuercher. "The younger children will be excited about being with the older ones . . . The socialization process is exciting."

In addition to three bedrooms, the apartment has a comfortably furnished living room, a dining room with a mirrored wall, and a full kitchen and bathroom. There is also a backyard where summer barbecues will be held.

While there is a color TV in the living room of the air-conditioned apartment, it will not provide a major form of entertainment.

"We're not custodial," said Mrs. DelBagno. "There will be a lot of socializing going on."

Trips AHRC group house members take will extend to respite house guests. Visits to Broadway shows, the beach, ball games and the Ice Capades are among the trips planned.

"We set no limits on them," said Fishman of those AHRC serves.

For additional information on the respite house, call Meghan Howe, AHRC respite screening coordinator, at 212-254-8203 on Mondays and Thursdays.