

Mentally handicapped: Many groups and programs

BY ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

A sad chapter in the state's treatment of the mentally retarded ended last September when the Staten Island Developmental Center — the former Willowbrook State School — closed its doors.

Willowbrook during the early 1970s was crowded with thousands of patients. As many as 6,000 people were jammed in the understaffed and unsanitary institution. Media investigations followed by a class action suit revealed the horror of Willowbrook to the public.

In 1975, as a result of that class action filed in 1972, a federal judge ordered the state to move Willowbrook residents into group homes. Deadlines through the years went unmet by the state and the settlement terms were extended.

A final settlement between the state and the plaintiffs required that all former Willowbrook residents and those who are still living at the facility be placed in group homes by 1992. Of past Willowbrook clients, 110

remain on the grounds in Executive Way, a complex of group homes. The others have either moved into community facilities elsewhere or other developmental centers. By 1992, those in these centers will go to group homes.

To continue to serve the mentally retarded, the state has retained about 175 acres of land from the old institution's 380-acre site. The land retained holds the Institute for Basic Research, small group homes, administrative buildings and the Elizabeth A. Connelly Community Resource Center — a clearing house of services and information.

The remaining 205 acres of the site will become the new campus of the College of Staten Island. The college plans to consolidate its Sunnyside and St. George campuses on the Willowbrook site by the end of 1992.

The college, the institute and the Staten Island Developmental Disabilities office will work jointly to establish the Center for Developmental Neurosciences. It will generate interdisciplinary research and grant programs, tech-

nical, non-degree and related training and offer professional supervision for field and clinical staff.

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The Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities offers a number of services on the grounds of SIDC including a respite/drop-in center.

The respite center offers parents a place to leave retarded children for up to 30 days a year if they cannot be cared for at home. The drop-in center, a day program, operates from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. every day.

SIDC is not accepting new admissions. For families who need information about Island services, contact the Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Information Exchange at the Staten Island Boro Developmental Services Office (BDSO), 26 Dumont Ave., Dongan Hills. The number is 351-7701 between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

The information and referral service acts as a central directory

of services for the retarded and developmentally disabled on Staten Island.

BDSO provides a number of services including case management, drop-in/respite services, homemaker services and crisis intervention. The latter, crisis intervention, can be contacted 24 hours a day at 983-5200 after business hours. During the day, the number is 351-7730 at the BDSO office.

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

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

● Association for the Help of Retarded Children operates two adult group homes, one on the grounds of the former Staten Island Developmental Center and the other at Petersen House at 200