

# SIDC's last clients in 'prototype' homes

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Marking a new era in care for the severely developmentally disabled, the state has relocated the last 48 clients from the former Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC) in three "prototype" houses.

The Executive Way homes, named for the street they're on, opened in conjunction with the September closing of SIDC and the creation of the Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Services Office (SIDDSO).

"This is a really important opportunity to show that the medically fragile, multiply handicapped can live in a community setting," said Dr. Hugh Tarpley, SIDDSO's deputy director for developmental services.

"This was the population many people were most concerned about — what would happen to them when SIDC closed," he said. Some advocates and families feared that these clients, most of whom are profoundly retarded and medically frail, might require an institutional setting to be assured the round-the-clock care they need.

"I was probably one of those people who needed to be convinced," said Assemblywoman Elizabeth A. Connelly, D-West Brighton, who toured the homes last week for the first time. As chairman of the Mental Hygiene and Addiction Control committee, she has visited similar homes opening around the

state as the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities prepares to close its five remaining developmental centers by 1991.

The \$5.2 million Executive Way group homes are just a short distance from the shuttered buildings of the former Willowbrook State School, notorious for abhorrent treatment of the mentally retarded. In the 1960s, the school warehoused some 6,000 clients in wards designed for a capacity of 4,500.

On Executive Way, 24 people live in the largest of the three houses, with 12 in each of the other two. The homes are attractive and comfortable with modern medical equipment but no antiseptic smell or feel.

Anthony Pinto, head of an organization for clients' families, said the group is pushing for more staff in the homes. Currently there is one professional staff person for every three clients, and one direct-care staff member for every six clients.

Looking into one of the two-person bedrooms, Mrs. Connelly remarked that just several years ago, these same clients were in wards, one bed next to another. Then federal regulations required the creation of cubicles for some sense of privacy.

Last year's closing of SIDC and the relocation of its last clients to group homes on and off the Island are the result of the landmark 1975 Willowbrook Consent Decree to phase out the institution.

Watching an Executive Way staff member gently

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# Center

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work with a 30-year-old spastic quadraplegic, the court order's intent is clear. This woman, who has severe spinal deformity and the mental capacity of less than a 2-year-old, might easily have been the victim of abusive neglect in the former institution.

The new Executive Way homes are part of SIDDSO's Richmond Complex, 13 group homes on the Willowbrook grounds that house 114 clients.

Though clustered together — critics would say too closely to accomplish the goal of mainstreaming clients into the community — the homes give residents a sense of belonging to a family, according to staff.

During the day, residents go to various programs, some on the Willowbrook grounds. They have chores to perform "at home" but also enjoy their own free time. Staff members make sure that cooking, cleaning and shopping are done, and they work with clients on independent-living skills like grooming.

Mabel Berry, a community resident aide in one of the homes, refers to the six men, ages 21 to 46, as the "boys," a common tag by longtime staffers.

"They can be very aggressive," said Irene Granath, a program manager, but the staff is trained to handle outbursts.

Transferring clients from wards to group homes has made a "fantastic difference" in clients' participation in programs and outings, Ms. Granath said. "We had a couple of clients who wouldn't go anywhere when they were in wards — one of them just went to camp for two weeks."

Clients appreciate the homey setting, she said. "They actually notice things like new curtains."

In addition to the Richmond Complex on SIDDSO's approximately 120 acres, the non-profit Association for Children with Retarded Mental Development (ACRMD) runs another group home and a job-

training workshop. The state Dormitory Authority and City University of New York have taken over 187 acres of the former SIDC grounds to build a consolidated campus for the College of Staten Island, scheduled to open in 1992.

SIDDSO's property also includes the Elizabeth A. Connelly Community Resource Center, which serves about 70 profoundly retarded clients with behavior problems.

"We're a last resort — they have to be rejected from two other programs, so we're not in competition with the non-profits," said Connie Williams, center director. Individual programs are designed for each client's "maladaptive behavior."

SIDDSO has taken over the role of the former Borough Developmental Services Office in referring any Staten Island clients with developmental disabilities. The office is responsible for serving 2,300 clients "with substantial functional disability" in a variety of private and state programs, said Robert Witkowsky, SIDDSO director.

Among his goals are developing more group homes around the Island that probably will be run by non-profit providers.

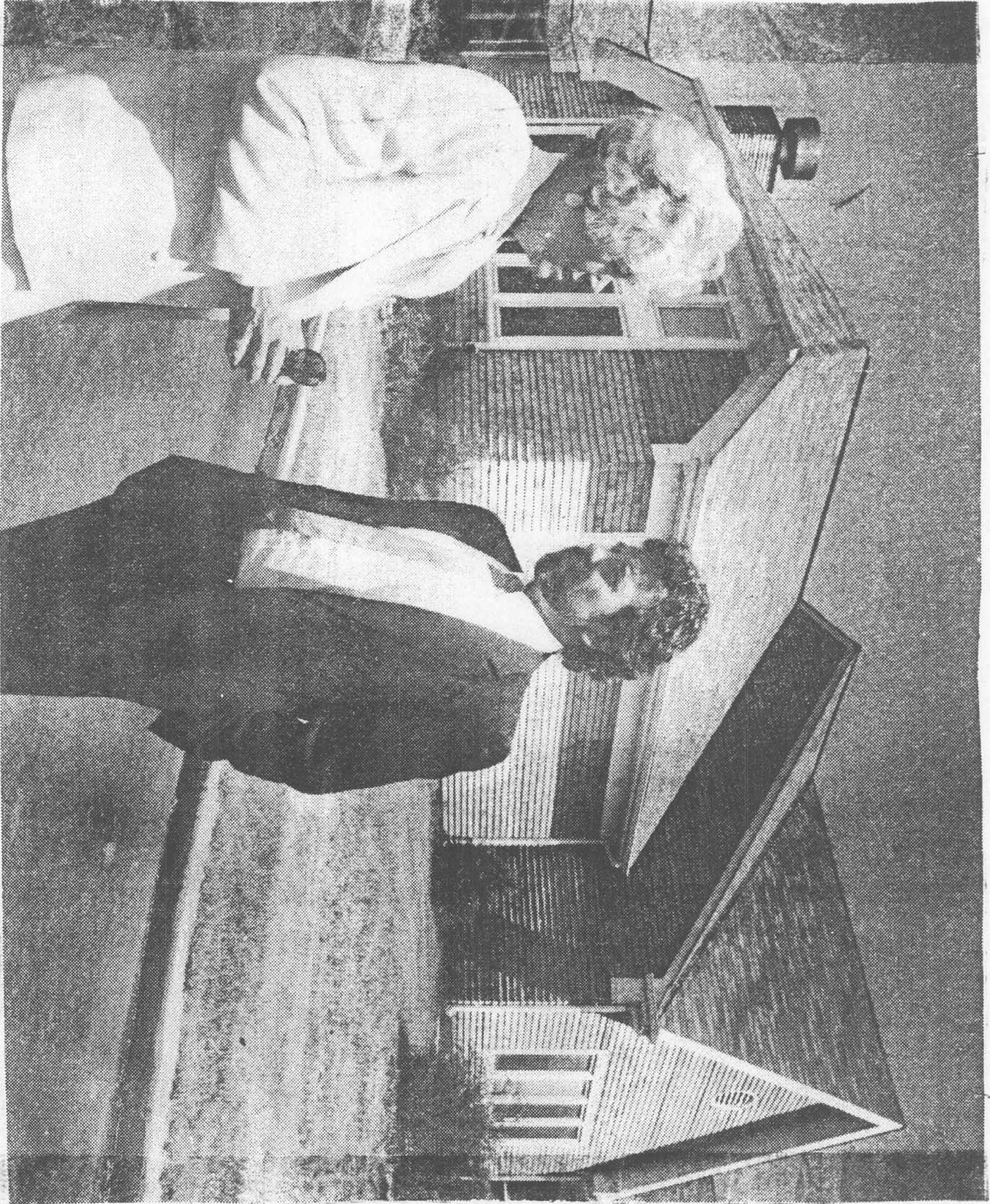
The existing group homes on the Willowbrook grounds are "like a dream come true to us — that the kids would be going out and have, like, a normal family," said Dr. Louis Siegel, chief of service. Now that all the clients are located in group homes, "we're working more on the quality of the programs," he said. During Willowbrook's notorious past, Dr. Siegel served as a psychologist.

"All of these houses represent individual families to these clients," he said, pointing to former staff houses that were renovated for group homes. "They've been reborn, I think, into a new life. All the employees are proud of the transformation. We have a vision of where we're going that's more clearly marked with the closing of (SIDC)."

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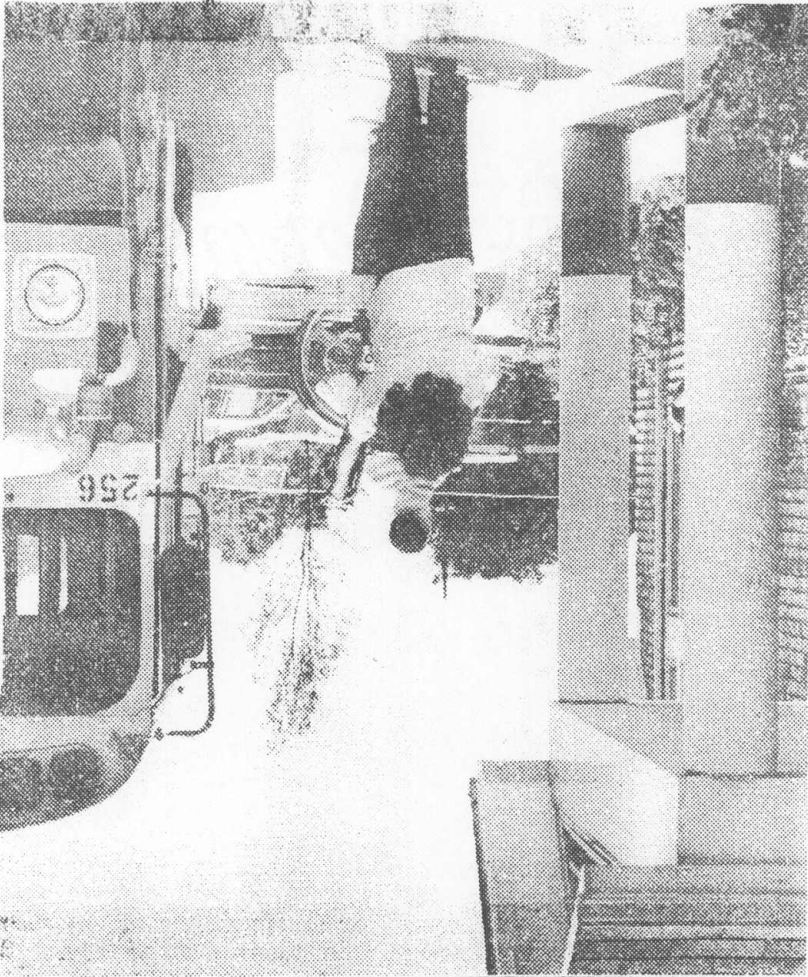
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Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly and Dr. Hugh Tarpley, SIDDSO's deputy director for developmental services, get together outside the center's three "prototype" houses.

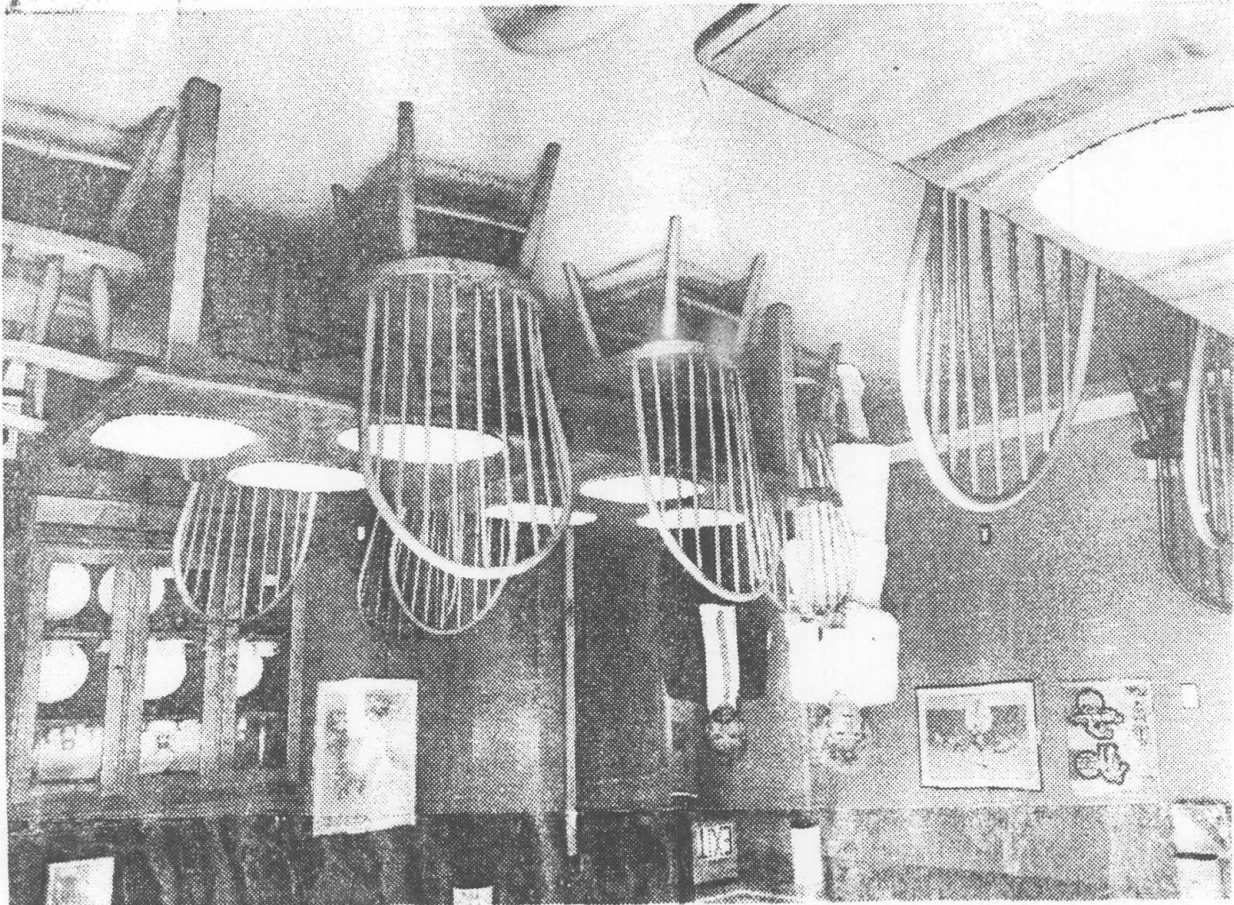
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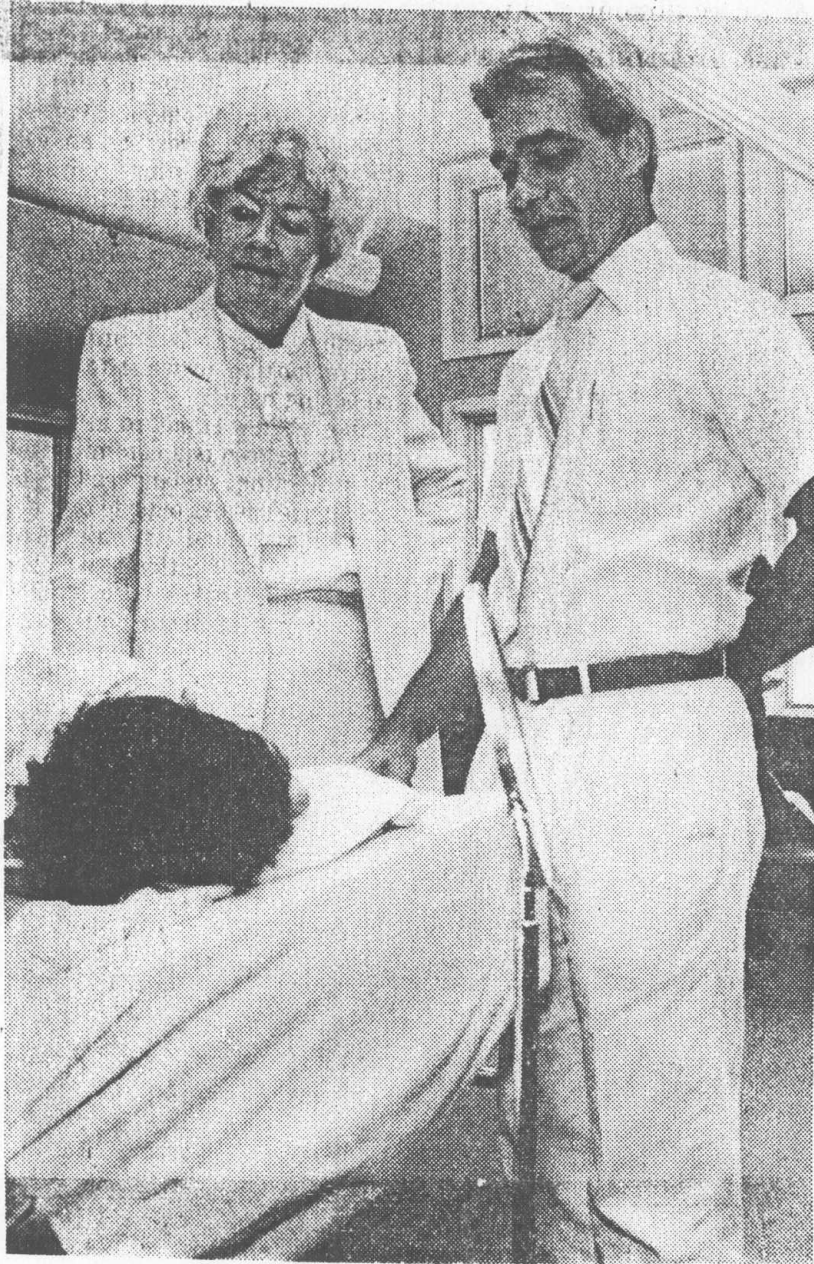
A patient is helped off a bus in front of the Executive Way homes.

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Mrs. Connelly inspects the dining area with Dr. Tarpley.





**Mrs. Connelly and Joseph Rando, manager of Executive Way homes, check a patient during a recent tour.**