

# Center

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(From Page 1)

work with a 30-year-old spastic quadriplegic, 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)."

Page 2 of 5 Pages