

Agencies, organizations serve mentally disabled

■ From group homes and schools to testing centers to support groups for families

ADVANCE STAFF REPORT

In stark contrast to the services provided more than two decades ago by the former Willowbrook State School, local agencies and organizations are taking every measure today to successfully meet the needs of the developmentally disabled.

Willowbrook, during the early 1970s, was inhabited by as many as 6,000 people crowded into the understaffed and unsanitary institution.

In 1975, as a result of a class-action suit filed three years earlier, 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 were still living at the facility be placed in group homes by 1994. By March 1993, the last was out.

To continue to serve the mentally disabled, the state has retained about 175 acres of land from the old institution's 380-acre site. The site is now the headquarters of the Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Service Office (DDSO), the Institute for Basic Research (IBR), and the Elizabeth A. Connelly Community Resource Center.

The remaining 200 acres became the new campus of the College of Staten Island (CSI), the largest such campus in the state. Classes began there in the fall of 1994. The college has joined in a bid to improve the training of workers in the field of developmental disabilities.

The CSI/IBR Center for Developmental Neurosciences was established in 1987 to provide students with experience in the field by blending the academic resources of CSI with the research and training available at IBR. It also provides opportunities for study and research.

The Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Information Exchange, operated by the DDSO, is a good place for families who need information about Island services for the developmentally disabled. Call 982-1904 Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Here's a closer look at the services available on the Island for the mentally and developmentally disabled

■ **DDSO**, a state agency working under the umbrella of the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, offers a number of services at 930 Willowbrook Rd., Building 12.G, 10314.

The DDSO offers residential services at its Willowbrook headquarters, community residences and at a handful of intermediate care facilities throughout the Island. DDSO also operates a multiple-disabilities unit on the grounds of South Beach Psychiatric Center, Building C. The DDSO operates a respite center that offers day, evening and overnight supervision. Parents can leave their children at the respite center for up to 30 days a year if they cannot be cared for at home (982-1904). The drop-in center operates from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. every day.

Respite, case management, referral services, crisis intervention and homemaker services are offered at 930 Willowbrook Rd., building 12G. For information, call 982-1904.

■ **Elizabeth A. Connelly Community Resource Center** provides space for programs and events sponsored by Island agencies who work with and care for individuals with developmental disabilities. The center has a therapeutic pool with a pneumatic bottom that rises or falls, according to setting. It is the only one of its kind on the Island. The center is open weekdays from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m., and has flexible hours on the weekend. For information on services, call 983-5415.

■ **The IBR (494-0600)** is the research component of the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities. IBR conducts laboratory and clinical research, offers clinical services and presents educational programs.

IBR contains the George A. Jervis Clinic, where patients are seen for diagnostic evaluations and other tests. The outpatient clinic serves all residents of New York state. The clinic also acts as a diagnostic research clinic for tertiary treatment of complex or intractable conditions. For information and referrals, call the social services division at 494-5126.

IBR also offers a Genetic Counseling Center, where Island residents can obtain tests for a variety of genetically transmitted disorders. The clinic offers prenatal screening, counseling and evaluation of possible genetic disorders. For information, call 494-5369.

The Consolidated Clinical Lab (CCL), a division of the IBR, provides specialty testing for genetic disorders and neurodegenerative disorders (494-5221).

Also affiliated with IBR is Staten Island Medical Imaging, Inc. — a multi-modality diagnostic imaging center opened to the general public as an outpatient facility. Services are provided to physicians and their patients, managed care organizations, state agencies and hospitals.

The Infant Development Program, a research program offered by IBR, tests infants and toddlers to identify those at risk for developmental disabilities. Its purpose is also to develop and implement methods to treat those children in need.

The Prevention Education Resource Center (PERC) provides the public with information about mental retardation and other developmental disabilities, and currently responds to approximately 350 inquiries per year.

IBR houses a number of support groups, including those for Down syndrome and autism.

Also housed at IBR are the New York City Parent Center (494-4872), which was created to help parents and professionals get appropriate services for children with developmental disabilities, and The Children's House (982-5005), a pre-school program for autistic children, jointly sponsored by IBR and the Association in Manhattan for Autistic Children, Inc.