

Toni and Nick Cutrone, however, are an exception.

Recently, the couple received approval to build a community residence in Willowbrook for five developmentally disabled men, including their son, who currently lives at another Island residence.

Mrs. Cutrone, saying it would be "counterproductive," declined to

specify why she wants to operate her own community residence.

Still, most parents report their children have prospered in the borough's community residences.

Many community home residents work — typically at low-paying jobs in the fast-food or service industries — while others attend vocational workshops. Nearly all have chores in the house. The wages, training and responsibility instill independence in the developmentally disabled they might not have attained at home under doting parents.

Mrs. Gregoli said her daughter, Lynn, and her housemates have planned several vacations, including a self-paid cruise this August to Puerto Rico and the Caribbean.

"It's the best thing I ever did for her," she says.

Yet for all the success stories, the decision to separate from a child is never an easy one.

Judge Straniere admits he has second thoughts. But Gregory, who doesn't speak and so cannot verbalize his feelings, apparently is adjusting to his new home.

"Is he going to feel abandoned? That's the biggest fear," Straniere says.

Still, Straniere believes he made the right choice. And, he says, the options today are far better than they were three decades ago, when his son would have been placed in what became known as one of the country's most nefarious institutions for the mentally retarded.

"You're taking somewhat of a leap of faith," he says, "but 30 years ago he would have been in Willowbrook."



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Isabelle Schelker of Port Richmond is trying to get her son into a community residence.