

Camelot pushes for new clinic

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Camelot Counseling Centers would like to place an outpatient drug counseling clinic at a center for disabled people at the former Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook, but there may be no room for it.

Such a clinic could serve about 50 substance abusers a day and provide counseling for individuals, peer groups and families, said Luke Nasta, executive director of the Port Richmond-based group.

Nasta stressed that no drugs would be distributed by the 25 staff members. "We'll only be giving out advice," he said of the facility that, pending state approval, could open in a year at the Elizabeth A. Connelly Community Resource Center.

But officials at the center offer little hope for an outpatient clinic there. According to Robert Witkowsky, director of the Staten Island Boro Developmental Services Office (SIBDSO), which oversees the Connelly Center, there is simply no room for it.

"We've decided to focus on filling the building with programs for the developmentally disabled and mentally retarded," Witkowsky said.

While SIBDSO has not closed its door to Camelot, neither has it opened it for applications from

any group outside those working with the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, he said.

A final space analysis will be made in mid-November, at which time decisions will be made on any open space — "But I don't believe there will be any," he said. Witkowsky noted that several other groups, including those for senior citizens, have been turned away.

Actually, Camelot had requested to place an outpatient clinic and a residential drug treatment center for 20 teen-age abusers at the site in November, 1986. In December, 1987, the housing request was denied, the clinic request deferred for further review.

Recently, however, Camelot has renewed its interest in the outpatient clinic. But the Connelly Center in the interim has isolated its focus on the developmentally and mentally disabled.

"There is a need for these services Islandwide," Nasta said. "And when a site appears available, it is our duty as service providers to explore it. The Connelly Center handles people with emotional problems and we would perform a similar service."

Community Board 2 chairman James Chin said that he was recently approached by Nasta for board support on the proposal for an outpatient drug rehabilitation center. "He's hoping that board support will help get this approved by the state," Chin said.

Chin noted that Community Board 2 has endorsed the concept of such small-scale residential drug treatment centers. "I think we need something like this," said Chin, who, in the same breath adopted a guarded tone, "as long as it's deep within the developmental center." The Connelly Center is located on the outer

edge of the site, bordering Forest Hill Road.

If established, the clinic, whose clients would be "functional" people who do not have severe abuse problems and who do not require daily treatment, would be the first in Community Board 2. The facility, which would be funded by the state Division of Substance Abuse Services (DSAS), would operate Monday through Saturday, and be open 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. weekdays and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday, Nasta said.

Camelot also plans to open a rehabilitation home for 25 adolescent substance abusers at 273 Heberton Ave., Port Richmond. The prospect has faced staunch opposition from Port Richmond civic groups and Community Board 1, which believes it is burdened with more than its share of social service centers.

At a meeting of the Area III committee on Monday, members showed equal doses of endorsement and trepidation on the outpatient clinic.

Board member Frank DeLuca of Woolley Avenue, Willowbrook, said that while he encouraged developing drug treatment centers, he was concerned about the quality of the people the facility would draw.

Nasta said, "The people using this facility would be from the community. They are already using the public transportation and the supermarkets. We're not talking about crazed criminals. Just people who are having some difficulty in their lives."



Luke Nasta
'There is a need'