

Disabilities program completes last phase

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The Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Services Office (SIDDSO) officially completes its consolidation today on the grounds of the former Willowbrook State School.

"This is the final phase of Willowbrook becoming a community-based program," said Robert Witkowsky, SIDDSO director.

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

SIDDSO retains about 120 acres that will continue to be maintained by the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities. The Institute for Basic Research will take over three buildings on about five acres, Witkowsky said.

The hectic relocation of the SIDDSO business and administrative staff from Building 1 into Building 46 may stretch through the weekend, he said. But as of 5 p.m. today, the old telephone system will shut down and a new one will kick in. Phone numbers for the agency will remain the same.

SIDDSO came into existence last year, coinciding with the September 1987 closing of the former Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC), successor to the notorious Willowbrook school for the mentally retarded.

SIDDSO is charged with referring any Staten Island clients with developmental disabilities into appropriate programs. The office serves about 2,300 clients with substantial functional disabilities.

Besides being SIDDSO's base of operations, the agency's property includes the Richmond Complex, 13 group homes for about 115 clients.

The property also houses the Elizabeth A. Connelly Community Resource Center, which serves about 70 profoundly retarded clients with behavior problems. The non-profit Association for Children with Retarded Mental Development (ACRMD) runs job training workshop in the Connelly center.

The Association for the Help of Retarded Children (AHRC), which currently runs a group home on the grounds, is preparing to relocate the facility, but the agency has yet to name a site, an AHRC spokeswoman said.