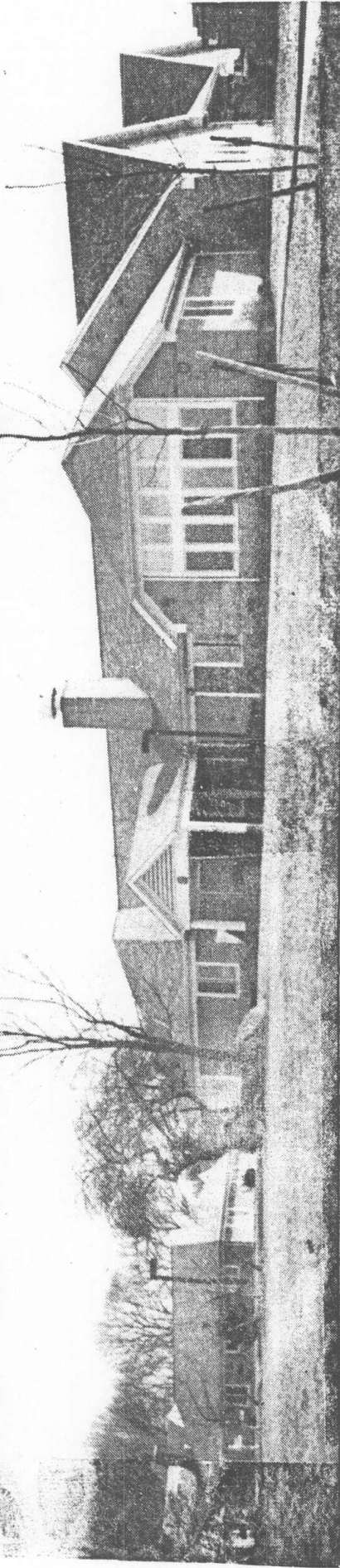


NYC-based community care

# A more creative approach



One of the brand new intensive care units on the grounds of the former Staten Island Development Center.

By Stephen Madarasz  
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NEW YORK — The unique challenge of transforming state developmental centers into community-based mental retardation facilities in New York City was the focus of a recent tour by CSEA and Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) officials.

CSEA President Joe McDermott and Region II President George Boncoraglio joined with OMRDD Commissioner Arthur Webb and other officials during the day-long visit to Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Service Office (DDSO) — formerly Staten Island Developmental Center — and Howard Park, a satellite facility of the Bernard Fineson/Queens Developmental Center.

The CSEA group used the opportunity to compare the New York City operations with similar upstate facilities.

“There’s no question that progress is being made in the city,” said McDermott. “But the pace of the progress and the smooth transition from developmental centers to community residences still isn’t as good as we’d like to see. . . . what we’re seeing upstate.”

The CSEA leader added that this was not due to a lack of commitment from OMRDD so much as the practical difficulties of undertaking any project of this kind in New York City.

“There are a whole range of problems from real estate costs to community resistance to inadequate pay to transportation and child care difficulties that are just harder to deal with in New York City than in upstate communities,” McDermott said. “But the answer isn’t to give up — it’s a matter of finding more creative ways to make a community system work. Based on what I’ve seen, it can be done.”

“We need a better balance between the state and the private sector on community residences,” added Boncoraglio. “We need to see more state-run community residences of all types opened up in the city because when clients are ready to move out of the developmental centers, the only options are to send them upstate or to the private sector operations. That’s just not right, they belong here in their own communities.”

In fact, many of the clients remaining in state facilities are multiply disabled or so severely handicapped that most private agencies will not even accept them.

The frontline staff in OMRDD provides an essential service to some of the most difficult yet vulnerable people in our society,” said McDermott. “The care and concern they have for each individual client has to be seen to be believed. So we as a union have a responsibility to make sure they get the help they need to provide this care in the best possible setting.”

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