

OMRDD changes bring 'a whole new world'

STATEN ISLAND — It took some time and adjustment, but CSEA members who experienced the transformation of their developmental centers into group homes and community-based day treatment centers have seen some positive and at times surprising results.

"It's a whole new world out here and it took people some time to get used to it," said Staten Island Developmental Center CSEA Local 429 President John Jackson. "But the working conditions are a lot better for our members and that makes a big difference for the clients, too."

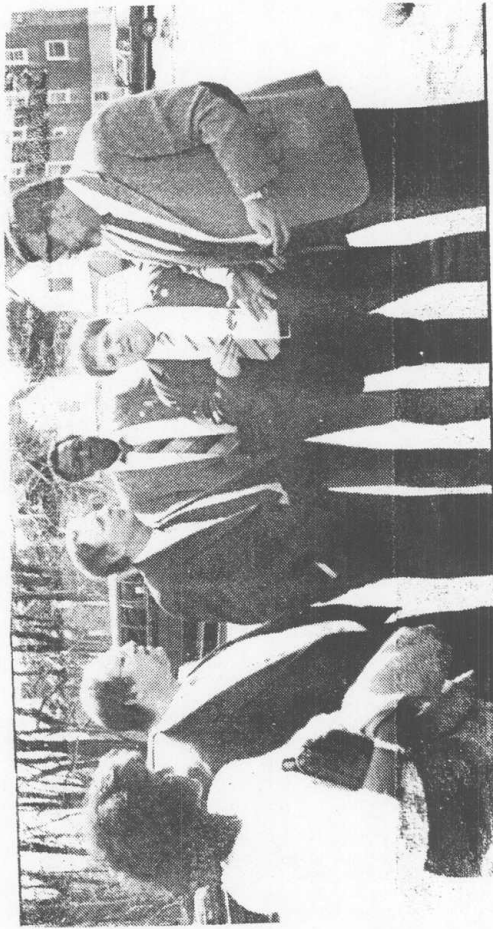
Jackson's remarks were echoed by Craig Developmental Center CSEA Local 429 President Kathy Button.

"The whole experience was very different from what people expected," she said. "People were scared — you're talking about individuals who had worked in a developmental center 20 to 30 years who didn't know if they could handle a completely different setting."

"A lot of people didn't realize how much they had to give until they got out there into the community residences," she added. "But they can do the job and they're starting to see a whole different side of the clients."

The Craig experience stands as a model of orderly transition. Nearly all CSEA employees of the developmental center were able to transfer directly into the group homes and services, including operational staff. Almost unbelievably, most people received their top choices of work locations, shifts and pass days through the help of a computerized bidding process.

While the Staten Island staff is only about half of what it was several years ago, CSEA-OMRDD cooperation saved the jobs of more than 1,000 members through retraining, providing opportunities to transfer to other metropolitan area facilities and an unprecedented program for lateral transfers to upstate facilities at state expense.



CSEA President Joe McDermott, third from left, listens while Staten Island DDSO Facility Director Robert Witkowsky, right, makes a point during a recent tour of New York City-based group homes and services for the mentally retarded. Also making the tour are, from left, Craig Developmental Center CSEA Local 405 President Kathy Button; CSEA mental hygiene consultant Marty Langer, Staten Island Developmental Center CSEA Local 429 President John Jackson and CSEA Region II President George Boncoraglio.

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