

Training for disabled begins with celebration

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Staten Island's first training program to help the developmentally disabled enter sheltered workshops was celebrated at a reception yesterday in Willowbrook.

With about 80 workshop clients at work on either side of them, more than 70 people gathered in the Association for Children with Retarded Mental Development (ACRMD) building, part of the Elizabeth A. Connelly Resource Center in Willowbrook.

Down the hall, 14 clients in the new training program are learning the skills needed to move from the highly-structured classroom settings of day treatment programs to greater independence in the workshops. A behavioral specialist and a trainer's aide staff the program, which opened this month.

The non-profit ACRMD began three similar training programs

at off-Island locations four years ago, said Paul Oddo, assistant executive director for the citywide agency.

"There was a great deal of apprehension" over the idea, he said. People wondered if including clients with a lower level of development in workshops would hurt quality control or the ability to meet deadlines for the contract work done, such as collating cards and cosmetics.

But with the goal of helping clients live more independent and satisfying lives, the idea was adopted. So far, said Oddo, 75 of 150 people served in the programs have successfully entered workshops, and two have gone on to competitive employment outside the agency.

Arthur Webb, commissioner of the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, congratulated the organization on its program, as did

ACRMD President Milton Friedman.

The appreciative crowd was most pleased to hear from the keynote speaker, Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly, a 16-year veteran of that body and chairwoman of its Committee on Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.

"Hollywood has their Elizabeth, and we have ours," said ACRMD Executive Director Ida Rappaport, to the delight of the audience.

Mrs. Connelly took note of the facility's location on the site of the former Staten Island Developmental Center, which succeeded the Willowbrook State School after news accounts exposed overcrowding and abusive conditions there in the 1970s.

"It's important that we're reminded of those days to appreciate how far we've come in the