

Neighborhoods have nothing to fear from group homes

I was deeply saddened upon reading the Oct. 25 article concerning the proposed group home for retarded adults in Fort Wadsworth.

Obviously, from reading the article, most of the screaming residents who attended the Oct. 24 meeting are misinformed about the group home and are confusing the mentally retarded with the mentally ill, or psychiatric clients that live in local homes and are allowed to wander freely in neighborhoods.

There are many group homes all over Staten Island that are solely for mentally retarded residents. They are not psychiatric patients, drug addicts, rapists, killers or criminals. They are very slow learners and must be supervised every minute or they may injure themselves. They can be naive like children. They may make strange sounds and can often look disoriented. They have feelings. They laugh a lot. Sometimes they cry even more. They have tantrums. They are helpless.

Fortunately there are many programs and organizations that encourage and support them throughout their lives.

At some point in time they need to leave home and have a life of their own. Staff, on eight-hour shifts, are there at the group home to supervise their needs. Their families, who also live on Staten Island, visit them and probably know the neighbors of the group home very well. Neighborhood Advisory Boards are always in place so that communication is open.

The Fort Wadsworth protesters certainly should listen and look again at this proposal. I have several group homes for the retarded in close proximity to my home and they are just fine! Look around! There are many — but not nearly enough!

As a parent of a retarded child, I have had the opportunity of meeting many wonderful Staten Island parents of older retarded adults who have been patiently

waiting for group homes to be built on Staten Island. They have been devoted to their children, and need a break from the stress of caring for their handicapped child.

Several nonprofit agencies, with the help of the New York State OMRDD, are trying to provide for the needs of retarded Staten Islanders by developing and managing group homes.

Given the opportunity, I would gladly introduce Mr. Jesse Hecht, Ms. Joan Roitzsch, and Mr. James Mazurkiewicz to several group homes in my neighborhood and in several others so that they can meet the staff, residents, and neighbors. Afterward, perhaps they would change their minds about whether they would welcome the retarded residents of their block.

Unfortunately, the retarded can't decide what block they would like to live on.

Laura Kennedy
New Brighton

Why neighborhood is upset about the proposed group home

I would like the people of Staten Island to know why the residents of the Ft. Wadsworth-Rosebank area are so disgruntled and outraged about the proposal of a group home on Hope Avenue — our community.

The first we knew about this proposal was when we read it in the Staten Island Advance on Oct. 20. The notice of the Community Board 1 meeting was in the same article. This article stated that the existing dwelling would be demolished and a new one-family home built on the site. Who is paying for this construction? Is it the owner, the state, the Independent Living Association? Is someone else erecting this new home and the state renting it? After all it is our tax dollars and our community involved. It would be nice if we knew how our taxes are being spent and by whom.

The area residents feel the buildable property is too small (43 feet by 124 feet) for a one-family (or so they say) home large

enough to accommodate 11 residents, two over night counselors, 17 staff members and still have room for off-street parking and a recreational area for the severely retarded residents.

In the Staten Island Advance article of Oct. 20, it was stated that this site would house 11 retarded men, ages 21 — 40. At the Community Board 1 meeting on Oct. 24, Mr. Welch, the Independent Living Association representative could not or would not answer any of our questions, as to the number of off street parking spaces, type of residents, size of home or whether or not employees had background checks or drug screenings.

Mr. Welch referred to the house proposed to be demolished as a "dilapidated shack." This house,

sold for \$172,000 in April '88, has been unoccupied, neglected and abandoned since then by its owner, Andrea Germano. It took one year of repeated phone calls and finally the help of Community Board 1 to have it boarded up to prevent vandalism or fire. Naturally after 18 months of neglect it is an eye sore. Is this the fault of the community? I don't think so.

When Mr. Welch was asked if he had any group homes in his neighborhood, he replied, no, the homes in his neighborhood were valued at \$1.5 million. Does this imply that group homes only belong in the less-affluent communities?

Is it any wonder that my fellow community residents and myself are irate?

Joan Roitzsch
Fort Wadsworth