

# State to increase \$\$ for retarded

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Staten Island will get state funding to care for an additional 140 mentally retarded people over the next two years, despite tight budgetary constraints, a state official said last night.

Elin Howe, the commissioner of the state Office of Mentally Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD), called the expansion part of "the biggest commitment to bed development" for such care facilities ever in New York City.

Ms. Howe, who in the directed the state's phasing out of the Staten Island Developmental Center, formerly the troubled Willowbrook State School, outlined state funding for her office last night at the annual membership meeting of Staten Island Aid Inc.

City care facilities for the mentally retarded, like the four currently run on the Island by Staten Island Aid, will get 1,100 extra beds out of the 3,000 statewide over the next two years.

The allocations come out of "a very fair budget in very difficult fiscal times," Ms. Howe said, calling them "an absolute tribute to the governor."

Staten Island Aid has plans for two new "intermediate care facilities," which typically house six to 10 people who need intensive care before making the transition to more ordinary lives, and two "community residences," which provide for those needing less care, said Joan Hodum, the group's executive director.

The OMRDD will direct its attention and funding towards new initiatives this year, Ms. Howe said.

That includes focusing more on retarded individuals who live at home, away from care facilities; enabling senior citizens with the disabilities to participate in activities planned by other senior groups; expanding family support

services, including relief services and transportation; increasing case-management services; providing temporary, intensive care for individuals with extreme behavior problems and closing developmental centers around the state, she said.

Four out of the state's 20 developmental centers, including the Staten Island Developmental Center, have already been closed. The office's budget this year allows for the closing of four more and replacing them with community-based services like the group homes and other services provided by Staten Island Aid.

The OMRDD also hopes to increase the pay for volunteer workers. Otherwise, "we're going to continue losing workers out of this field," Ms. Howe said.

"In the next two years, volunteers will be doing the majority of the work," particularly in areas where the state-run centers have shut down, she said.

Staten Island Aid provides preschool care for 8 children, daytime treatment services for 64 people, and vocational training for 165 mentally retarded, in addition to the group homes.

Ms. Howe was appointed head of the OMRDD in February. Before that, she served as the director of Staten Island's Developmental Services Office and then as the OMRDD's chief deputy.



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Elin Howe listens to concerns of parents in the audience.