

Your opinion

Group-home foes should be ashamed

The following is in response to recent letters by Lorraine Motola of Livingston and Elaine Moresco of Port Richmond Center, who expressed opposition to a planned group home in Port Richmond for autistic children:

Shame on Madames Motola and Moresco. These afflicted children do not ask to be born on the North or South Shore. But for the grace of God, these ladies do not know the pain of wondering where their children will wind up.

As the old saying goes, "What goes around comes around." ...

CARL SORTINO
New Dorp

Referring to the two recent letters ... [suggesting] a group home for autistic children at 53 Galloway Avenue be instead located on the South Shore: What difference does it make?

These children need a place where they can grow up and be wanted by the community.

For too long, people have been ignoring the autistic children... For years, parents of autistic children and mentally retarded children took care of their children without getting help from the federal, state and local [governments].

It is not a matter of where these children live ... but a matter of people growing up and facing up to the idea that handicapped people have just as much right to live in their neighborhood as they do

JAMES L GARGUILO
Westerleigh

[The writer is the brother of an autistic man]

I was deeply saddened to read on July 3 and July 12 that a group of Port Richmond Center residents are attempting to stop the sale of a house at 55 Galloway Avenue to On Your Mark, Inc., a fine, established, non-profit organization, which serves handicapped children and young adults from Staten Island.

My son lives at the On Your Mark group home... in New Brighton. His group home is ideal — well-run and staffed by experienced professionals, some of whom have worked with him for the past 10 years. He and his friends are happy and content. They go to school or work during the day and attend recreational programs every evening.

In this way they learn more, reach their fullest potential, and lead fulfilling lives, just like everyone else. Their families are very concerned and involved in their children's lives and have them home for very frequent visits. Everyone at this community residence lives in peace and harmony with their wonderful neighbors.

On Your Mark has a sterling reputation in the Staten Island community ...

As a native Islander from the North Shore, I cannot understand the anger, ignorance and prejudice exhibited by some people against an innocent minority who cannot defend themselves ...

SUSAN ARVANITES
Castleton Corners

I am very upset and horrified over recent letters published July 3 and July 12, attacking our developmentally disabled citizens and the staff of On Your Mark.

On Your Mark has been cited time and again for excellence in serving the handicapped.

All persons requesting residence are from Staten Island and it is our responsibility to take care of our own. I have been working with the developmentally disabled for over 20 years. ...

To answer the questions asked:

● Group homes and property are maintained very well, probably better than their neighbors. They have very strict state standards they must follow. The future of the home is just as guaranteed as anyone else who lives in the neighborhood.

● Constant supervision is provided around the clock. These young adults do not play loud music, do not race cars up and down the street, do not drink, do not use weapons, have noisy parties, shoot fireworks or take or sell drugs. They are good neighbors.

● The staff of On Your Mark are educated professional and para-professional persons well qualified for their positions.

● Since the property is kept nicely landscaped and the home is always in good repair, the home will not decrease property values but will be an asset to your community.

Most Islanders are more educated than to discriminate against the handicapped, and I hope that sooner or later the remaining group will be more understanding of those less fortunate than ourselves.

ANNE SIMINSKI
Stapleton

[The writer is a registered nurse.]

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On ... July 12 you ran letters concerning the opening of an On Your Mark Community Residence on Galloway Avenue, and a lot of the questions raised by the community were bona fide questions — if you do not know anything about mentally handicapped people.

My 10-year-old son is an autistic child, and he is on a list to be placed in a community residence in the future. Believe me, he is no threat to a community or to anyone's property values. In fact, if you were to see my son on the street, you wouldn't even know he was handicapped at all.

My concern is that, if and when he is placed, his residence is in a more stable community. Handicapped people have had their share [of instability] already.

The part where the [a group-home opponent] states that On Your Mark is inexperienced in running group homes is not the issue. On Your Mark is very experienced and very professional in handling the needs of all of their clients and their families, and their staff is second to none

...
JAMES J. McCUE
New Dorp