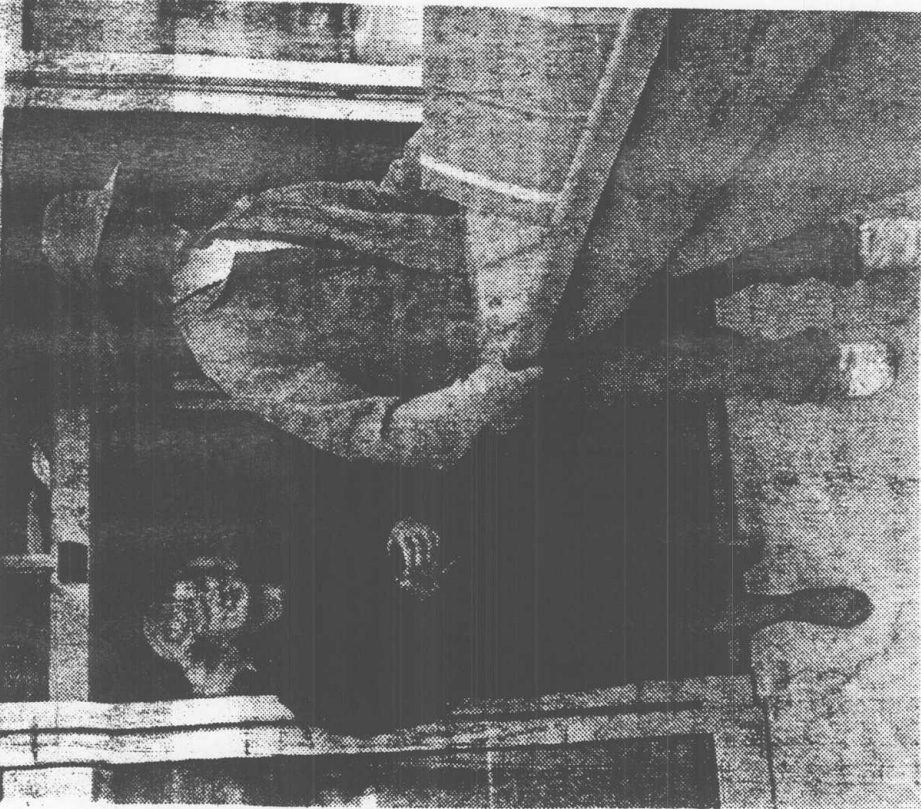


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# A parent's toughest choice



ADVANCE PHOTO/HILTON FLORES

Linda Coull watches her son, Eric, work at the United Cerebral Palsy Center in Port Richmond.

## Placing children with strangers

By EILEEN AJ CONNELLY  
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

"The most difficult thing that parents can do is place their children with strangers and depend on strangers to care for them."

Polly Panzella knows firsthand how difficult that is, because her son, Benny, 33, lives in a group home on the Island. Although sending Benny to live away from the family home in West Brighton was difficult, Mrs. Panzella doesn't regret the decision.

"He will always have to have someone taking care of him," she said matter-of-factly.

Living in a group home for the past year and a half, her son has learned to be more independent. "Benny has grown tremendously," Mrs. Panzella said.

Linda Coull of Graniteville has a similar opinion about the group home where her 21-year-old son, Eric, now lives. Having him live "on his own" has given Eric a chance to gain independence and skills he probably would never have developed if he had re-



## Group home Dilemma

mained with his mother, she said. Not every family that includes a person with developmental disabilities opts for the group home solution. But for the families who do, group homes often provide answers to troubling problems, as well as opportunities for their loved ones that other options might not provide.

"In my case I don't have an alternative," said a mother who asked that her name not be revealed. "My son is low functioning and needs to have someone there. He needs to be cared for."

(See CHOICE, Page A. 26)