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ADVANCE PHOTOS/STEVE ZAFFARANO

Linda Coull of Graniteville answers a question at an Advance Editorial Board meeting as Robert Witkowsky, right, director of the Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Services Office (SIDDSO), listens.

added.

"Oversaturation" of group homes for developmentally disabled people is not defined by law. The Padavan Law, on the other hand, says a community may reject a home site only if it would change the character of the community, Ms. Kennedy Shields said. Numerous homes that community boards have voted against in the past year have been approved by the state because the boards could not prove that level of impact, she said.

Kathy Kennedy-Shields, SIDDSO director of planning and development for community residences, said the state and private agencies pay careful attention to details, such as the architectural themes in communities so that group homes blend in the neighborhood.

### Says more are needed

Although there have been a number of community residences approved and opened on the Island in the past year, Witkowsky said more are needed. Of the 250 Staten Islanders registered with the SIDDSO for group home placement, at least 150 need a

place right now, he said.

Spatz said the role of group homes in the lives of developmentally disabled people and their families is changing. "It's not a last resort anymore," he said.

"The stereotype is that a parent waits until the individual is a burden and the parent can't care for him anymore," Spatz said. But the generation of developmentally disabled people who are now entering adulthood see community residences more in the way other people see leaving their parents' home and going away to college, he said.

Eric Coull moved into a community residence when he was 19 years old. "These kids want to leave home," said his mother, Linda Coull. "Mom is not the best person in the world for a young man to live with."

Special education schools like the Hungerford School in Clifton stress placement in a community residence as a positive step, Ms. Coull added. "All through school, they're saying independence," she said.

Those positive steps can be achieved in an even more inde-

pendent setting, such as a supportive apartment. Developmentally disabled people living in a group home who have learned the necessary daily living skills and need only a small amount of guidance or assistance are likely candidates.

Joe Lucerino, 33, an On Your Mark client who lives in a supportive apartment, said it offers him and his roommate the right balance of independence and help. "We shop, we cook, we do our laundry, just like everybody else," he said. Living independently has also allowed Lucerino to expand his social life. "I'm never home," he added.

The Advance Editorial Board for this meeting consisted of Brian J. Laline, Editor; Editorial Page Editor Mark Hanley; City Editor Thomas Checchi; Assistant City Editor Ken Paulsen; copy editor Michael Dominowski; and reporter Eileen AJ Connelly.)

For a look at a day in the life of a group home, see tomorrow's Advance.