

Home sweet group home

■ Residents find their group home offers them a place to learn, live and grow

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They have been roommates for only two years, but they have lived with developmental disabilities all their lives.

For Joe Thomas, Wendy Cogan and Jim Gordon, being disabled means living together in a co-ed group home in New Dorp with seven other disabled men and women between the ages of 21 and 42.

But they don't mind. To them, it's not the stereotypi-

cal "group home" that is feared — and fought — by neighbors.

The two-story dwelling on Amboy Road is their home away from home — a place where they learn life skills to help them master the art of independent living.

"I like my friends," Jim said while setting the dining room table for dinner with housemate Meryl Moskowitz.

Cooking dinner, setting the table, cleaning and gardening are just some of the chores the residents learn from care providers who work at the home around the clock.

These chores help give clients a sense of independence and accomplishment, according to house manager Cynthia Kirkwood.

"We try to promote a home-like environment and normalize it as much as possible. We promote independence," said Mrs. Kirkwood, who works for Community Resources for the Developmen-

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tally Disabled (CRDD), a not-for-profit agency that runs a total of seven group homes on the Island.

For the most part CRDD's clients who come from institutions such as Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC), Willowbrook, have made a successful transition into group-home living.

But sometimes getting clients to adjust to living in a community-based environment isn't easy, said Barbara Mercado, the direc-

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Staff member Maria Crespo looks on as resident Adrienne Biviano shows off her newly acquired ironing skills.

