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THE ISLAND

Autism facility battling state's abuse charges

■ Eden II officials maintain a 1995 state document contains false accusations of mistreatment

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Eden II, a Staten Island facility for autistic people, has amassed numerous reports of mistreating clients over the years — including accounts of striking children in its school and abusing adults in its group home — despite efforts by the state at reform, the Advance has learned.

The most recent reports of abuse and mistreatment emerged in a November 1995 report by the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD), which was obtained by the Advance.

But Eden II officials maintain that the 1995 report is filled with false accusations manufactured by a small group of disgruntled employees and parents. Beyond that they maintain that investigators sensationalized many accounts to the point where benign treatment procedures came to re-

Eden II was formed in 1976 by parents of six children with autism. It is now a non-profit agency under state supervision. It has a preschool and school for autistic children at 150 Granite Ave. in Elm Park, and an adult program that includes a 10-bed group home in Arden Heights. It also has a small school in Plainview, L.I.

semble abuse.

Although state officials say the facility has improved in recent months, state documents obtained by the Advance show that the agency was first reprimanded in 1988 and was still being blasted as recently as late last year for using "abusive techniques."

The November OMRDD report, which followed an investigation of the facility, stated: "The inves-

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tigation shows that the agency has failed to protect consumers. Abusive techniques have been used by staff at the school [and the] preschool."

State officials declined to discuss the report in detail and stressed that the 1995 report is part of a larger ongoing investigation of the facility, expected to be completed in several weeks. But the report — which was followed by several demands by OMRDD, including that Eden II hire a new executive director and select a new board of directors — was obtained by the Advance.

State officials emphasized that Eden II has done much to clean up its act in the past year, including hiring a new director, instituting a new board of directors and adding new oversight measures and training.

Eden II has undertaken to challenge the report's findings before OMRDD, asserting that instances of mistreatment are few and swiftly addressed.

"I know this report looks terrible, but it is not a final report, and we plan on contesting it," said Dominic DiPrisco, a member of Eden II's newly formed executive board and a parent of a child in the school. "It is a slanted report."

He added, "The assertions made in this report would constitute child abuse, and we don't do that."

Eden II officials acknowledged that abuse and mistreatment existed at its 10-person adult group home in Arden Heights, where accounts of abuse prompted the initial state review in 1988. In fact, the adult home, which houses men age 16 and over, is undergoing an even more severe state review than the school. That review threatens to close the home, or place it under direct state control, unless conditions improve. Eden II officials maintain, however, a change in leadership has resolved problems at the adult home.