

# Study finds homes have support

## Retarded people did better at small facilities, relatives say

By Sam Newlund  
Staff Writer

Relatives of those retarded people who have transferred from Minnesota state hospitals to smaller community homes generally applaud the move, according to survey results released Tuesday,

The findings add support to a proposal by the state Department of Human Services to close all state hospital services for the retarded. Under the department's plan, the hospitals' 1,500 retarded residents would move to community facilities, ending all current uses of the hospitals at Cambridge and Faribault, now called regional centers, and closing facilities for the retarded in five other institutions.

The department made the bid last week during negotiations with a number of groups that have an interest in the future of state hospitals.

The survey was conducted by Richard Cohen, a court monitor appointed to oversee implementation of a 1980 U.S. District Court consent decree on the care of the retarded in Minnesota.

Results from 110 families of retarded people who had been moved from regional centers to the community in 1985-86 showed that satisfaction with living arrangements tended to improve after the move was made.

This was true even for families of people with severe physical disabilities and difficult behavior problems,

the report said. It said most families who disagreed with the move changed their minds once they saw the advantages.

Mel Heckt, president of the Minnesota Congress of Advocates for the Retarded and a leading opponent of the state plan, said he had not seen the survey but believes that Cohen and others are "biased against regional treatment centers."

The main problem, he said, involves "the profoundly retarded, the severely retarded, who are also medically fragile, and some of the very old people whose homes are (the regional centers) and want to stay, there." They resent having to leave, Heckt said.

In the survey, most of the family members who responded were mothers and fathers. Asked of their satisfaction with services that their children or other relatives had received in the regional centers, the average response ranged from neutral to somewhat satisfied. But on current satisfaction in community placements, the average response was a high level of satisfaction.

Other results:

- The average family member lived 55 miles from the regional center and had to drive 70 minutes for a visit. But after the move, the averages were 20 miles and 30 minutes.

**Retarded continued on page 7B**

# Retarded

**Continued from page 3B**

- Forty-three percent of families visited regional centers at least once a month, but 51 percent visited the retarded person at least once a month after the move to the community. Retarded people in community placements also made home visits more often.
- Of 24 families who first disagreed with the move to the community, 75 percent changed their minds after the move.
- Among families of people with "severe physical or sensory impairments or challenging behavior problems," their levels of satisfaction with community placements were high and almost identical to respondents as a whole.

The report included written comments from respondents. Said one parent:

"We feel that our prayers have been answered for our son by (his) being in the group home instead of the state hospital. There is no comparison. He is like a different person. His behavior has changed dramatically for the better."