

HAMILTON: Benson visits township group home

Assemblyman discusses role of homes in light of facility closures

by James McEvoy, managing editor

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HAMILTON — While the ultimate fate of development centers in the state slated by a task force for closure by 2017 remains uncertain,



Assemblyman Dan Benson speaks with Janet, one of the residents of a home in Hamilton operated by the nonprofit Community Options Inc., on July 17. Staff photo by James McEvoy

Assemblyman Daniel Benson, D-14, toured a community-based facility home in Hamilton on July 17.

Assemblyman Benson, the vice chairman of the Health and Senior Citizens Committee, toured the facility and met with some of its residents.

Such group homes are seen by some as a potential alternative amid the move to close centers for those with developmental disabilities.

Last summer, a five-member task force appointed by Gov. Chris Christie and the state Legislature recommended the closure of the North Jersey Developmental Center, Totowa and Woodbridge Developmental Center within five years.

Community Options Inc. operates such a community-based facility in Hamilton Township. Community Options is a nonprofit organization that was incorporated in 1989. The nationally based organization's headquarters are located in Princeton.

The organization operates more than 100 community homes throughout the state.

Apart from providing housing and support, organizations such as Community Options also work with employers to find work for residents.

John Pavlovsky Jr., who is chairman of the Community Options business advisory council, noted that, in addition to employment opportunities, the organization provides other offsite daytime programming for residents.

Following his visit, Assemblyman Benson said he wanted to tour the home in light of ongoing changes in the state, specifically the potential developmental center closures.

"Obviously, being the vice chair of the Health Committee, these issues are important to me from a health aspect," he said. "But also as somebody who represents this community, these are my constituents as well."

He added, "It's good to see first hand the group homes that many of these families will be moving their family members into and seeing that these residents are part of our community."

He said he wants to raise awareness about the facilities and what they offer.

"From the outside, this will look like every other home elsewhere (with people) not knowing that there are these wonderful services being provided inside," he said. "I think it's important for the community to know about that."

Svetlana Repic-Qira, New Jersey regional vice president of Community Options Inc., said she is pleased the Garden State is moving to de-institutionalize state development centers.

"The closure of developmental centers will provide individuals the opportunity to live in their own homes, control their own lives and be active members of their home community," Ms. Repic-Qira said. "Community Options is looking forward to helping many more citizens live up to their full potential by living and working in our communities."

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