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They Have Beds, but Not the Ones They Want

By Jennifer Bleyer

Norman Bloomfield sat hunched over on his sagging twin bed at Surf Manor, a small adult home in Coney Island, and wondered why he was still there.

An elfin man with a shock of fine gray hair, Mr. Bloomfield, 60, spent three months in the psychiatric ward of Maimonides Medical Center in 2001. He then applied to Surf Manor, a faded red brick building on a bleak stretch of Surf Avenue, thinking it would serve as a temporary residence between the hospital and independent housing. But his months at Surf Manor have turned into years, because he cannot find another place to live.



Over the summer, Mr. Bloomfield and other members of an advocacy group called the Coalition of Institutionalized Aged and Disabled took steps to dramatize their plight and pressure government to take action. They set up a

list of people who are waiting for independent accommodations. A few weeks ago, the number of names on the list passed the 200 mark.

The list, which the group termed the “people’s waiting list,” is a nod to the Mental Health Housing Waiting List Bill, legislation passed by the Assembly and the Senate but vetoed in 2006 by Gov. George Pataki and again in August by Gov. Eliot Spitzer.... According to Geoff Lieberman, the coalition’s executive director, the goal is to prompt the state’s Office of Mental Health to help create more supportive housing specifically for adult-home residents. Sixty units of supportive housing are now in the pipeline — 20 each for Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx but, he said, “many more people want to move than 60.” Mr. Bloomfield, sitting on his narrow bed, agreed. “We have a roof over our head,” he said. “But it’s not appropriate housing. It’s a dead end.”