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# Inspectors Find Home for Men Full and Filthy

By [LESLIE KAUFMAN](#)

On Aug. 31, a team of state health inspectors, accompanied by police officers, forced their way into a four-story brownstone on Lafayette Avenue in Brooklyn. Residents and neighbors in Bedford-Stuyvesant had been complaining that the house, an unlicensed home for single adult men known as Alberta's Place, was an unsanitary blight.

Inspectors said that they found 67 men in bedrooms that were "very overcrowded, dirty and having foul odor," sleeping on mattresses infested with "bedbugs the size of roaches," and using bathrooms that were "filthy without toilet paper, no soap, no towels and no washcloths." The report, which was made available to The New York Times, also noted that food, medical oversight and medical dispensation were inadequate.

Several of the men, the report from the state Department of Health showed, had been referred from public places, including hospitals in Queens and Manhattan, and from city homeless shelters.

Alberta's Place is one of scores of private homes in Brooklyn and Queens, many of which describe themselves as therapeutic or supportive housing for the indigent. Advocates for the homeless and mentally ill say that these homes are receiving more and more referrals from public agencies.

The advocates are worried about the trend because the homes fall into a gray area of oversight and regulation.

The city's Department of Homeless Services acknowledges that the number of such referrals is increasing, though they are only a fraction of the total referrals from shelters. "We are talking about less than 200 this year at most," said Angela Allen, a spokeswoman for the department. The agency completes about 7,500 placements a year.

After the inspection, 20 of the sicker residents of Alberta's Place were relocated, and regulators demanded that the owners buy four new mattresses. But the home stayed open. The regulators said that they were monitoring Alberta's Place to see if it required licensing.

In a recent interview, the shelter's owner, Daryl Evans, said that he and his staff were doing their best with a highly troublesome segment of the homeless population, a group of men no one else wants.

City officials say they are under pressure to move single men out of shelters because Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg promised in 2004 to reduce the city's chronic homeless population by two-thirds. But they say they are sending only men capable of caring for themselves to homes like Alberta's Place, most of which they called decent.

If they receive complaints about a specific residence, they said, they send out e-mail messages warning the shelters not to send any more men there. A warning has been sent out about Alberta's Place.

Bill Lienhard, the director of the mental health project at the Urban Justice Center, said that his organization was hoping to gather enough evidence for a lawsuit to demand more constant regulation. He said Alberta's Place showed that whatever the official designation, sick and vulnerable people end up in these homes.

"These places find residents by trolling through the shelters and by calling psychiatric units," he said. "The state knows about it. The city knows about them. But because there is such pressure to find housing for these men, they have turned a blind eye."

Mr. Lienhard estimated that there were at least 50 of these homes in New York, many of them owned by people who have poor track records.

The Department of Health memo, for example, noted that Mr. Evans of Alberta's Place "has a history of operating other unlicensed boarding homes," and that at least one was closed by health authorities.

In a way, Mr. Evans did not disagree. "We are the lowest on the totem poll," he said. "Our primary function is to take undesirables. We take people who have been thrown out of other shelters because of their behavior. We take certain type of clients that might require more help, but I can't say I have any regrets about taking them. For a lot of them it was a matter of life and death."

Mr. Evans said that his shelter does have bedbugs, but that at least he has been fighting them with an exterminator.

"At least we are trying to do something about it," he said. "As far as cleanliness, we deal with a very difficult population. There are times when a client makes a mess and we are cleaning up behind."

He said he had nothing against being regulated.

The Department of Health said that since these private homes do not provide services to those who are too mentally or physically ill to care for themselves, they are not subject to annual inspections. If enough complaints are made about such a home, the Department of Health might investigate and might act — but then again, it might not.

“Each incidence is decided on a case-by-case basis,” said Jeffrey Hammond, a spokesman for the Department of Health. “If we received a complaint based on a public health concern we would investigate.”

Mr. Hammond said that lousy and dirty conditions could more likely be the responsibility of the city’s buildings and housing officials to investigate.

Patrick Markee, a senior policy analyst for the New York City Coalition for the Homeless, said he worried that clients are ending up at the private residences because the city is inappropriately pressuring them to leave shelters.

“In the last year, we have definitely seen increasing pressure on shelter residents to take these placements, site unseen,” he said. “In some instances, we’ve actually had staff present in meetings where the men were brow-beaten into taking a placement they didn’t want.”

He said some seriously ill men ended up in these places because they did not know enough to complain.

Anthony Dash is one resident of Alberta’s Place. He gave his age as 30 or 35, and said he has been homeless since his father kicked him out of their apartment a few months ago.

While he said he had been at Alberta’s Place for two weeks, his case file showed that he has been there two months. He said he agreed to go there voluntarily because his counselor at a city-run shelter told him it was nice.

Instead, he said, it was “very nasty.”

Mr. Dash said that he did not get enough to eat, and the bedbugs kept him up at night. “I have little nips all over my arm,” he said