



Mrs. George Zahn, seated left, founder and president of the Volunteer Workers of Willowbrook State School, discusses plans for future activities of the group at the institution. Standing at the parley are Mrs. Ralph Siebert, treasurer, left, and Mrs. Alfred Rasmussen, publicity chairman. Seated, left to right, are Mrs. Zahn; Mrs. Jane Rosenberg, co-chairman of publicity, and Mrs. Harriet Pynn, assistant to Mrs. Zahn.

## Willowbrook School Grateful to Women

By MARVIN DUSKIN

They say the best things in life are free. At least to the youngsters Willowbrook State School, many of the best things in their lives provided by the free, priceless services of the Volunteer Work of the institution.

"The children are extremely affectionate and appreciative," said Mrs. George Zahn, founder and president of the newly organized group. "There are 50 children and only two attendants to a ward, so that our added assistance is most necessary."

Although the volunteer unit didn't elect officers until May, it had been active at the school since last December under Mrs. Zahn's leadership and guidance.

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**THE IDEA** of the group was originated last October when Mrs. Zahn went to the school in an effort to find out what sort of toys would be acceptable for the boys and girls as Christmas gifts.

At that time, she volunteered her services but was thanked and told that, unfortunately, it was not permitted.

Soon afterward, however, she was sent for by Dr. Harold Berman, director, and asked to form a club to supplement the labor of the relatively small staff.

This she did, although "it took quite a while to get a pioneer group." Each of the eight charter members was a personal acquaintance of the Castleton Corners woman. In addition, the women of the Sisterhood of Temple Emanu-El, Port Richmond, were accepted in a body as an honorary member.

**THE SOCIETY NOW** boasts 18 members, who compose what is referred to as "an inside and an outside group." The "inside group" works with the children; the "outside group" collects toys, books, games, clothing.

"Our first work at the school was playing the piano during religious services," Mrs. Zahn recalled. The volunteers then had to attend three lectures of two hours each and take a field trip to discover the type of children with which they would deal, grades of retardation and various departments of Willowbrook.

The group currently is active in three principal functions at the institution. One of them is occupational therapy, wherein the children learn to weave (exercising their muscles and hands), color and thread beads under the supervision of paid, trained therapists.

In this category, the volunteers assist classroom teachers by sitting with the youngsters and aiding them with their reading and arithmetic. They likewise help with the school's Garden Group, and with dancing sessions every Thursday night, when the boys and girls "get together."

**NEXT THE WOMEN** take part in recreational therapy and plan to assist at parties and at picnics in Willowbrook Park.

Finally, they serve in the rehabilitation section, in which the trained therapists tend to the paralyzed children. A cerebral palsy victim herself, Miss Jane Rosenberg of Great Kills, a member of the Volunteer Workers and co-chairman of publicity, spends two afternoons a week in the rehabilitation clinic.

Noting the variety of humanitarians that go to make up the benevolent unit, the president spoke of Mrs. Helen Connelly, a retired teacher from Texas; Mrs. Ralph Seibert, a registered nurse, and Mrs. Harriett Pynn, who worked with Mrs. Zahn "from the very beginning" and plays the piano for the Jewish services at the school.

Mrs. Zahn, who, because of her completely filled schedule, finds

little time to stay in her home at Sturges street, Castleton Corners, interviews each volunteer before the group passes judgment.

"Everyone must fill out an application," she pointed out, "and is well screened before joining the organization."

**MRS. ZAHN** is deemed exceptionally well qualified for her post, what with her background in dealing with others and caring for her own family.

Wife of George Zahn, vice-president of the Brewer Dry Dock Company in Mariners Harbor, she has three daughters, Mrs. Charles Ames of East Orange, N. J.; Marcella, employed in the business office of Willowbrook, and Barbara, a student at Curtis High School. And then there's Mickey, her big, black, beautiful and friendly pet dog.

In 1942 and '43 she was secretary to Lt. Col. Ralph Cornell, chief legal adviser for the Manhattan District, which was charged with the development of the atomic bomb. Also during World War II, she held down two jobs simultaneously, one at night as a hearing clerk at a local draft board and the other in the personnel office of the Brewer Company.

Meetings of the Volunteer Workers are held once a month in their office in the school. Yellow and aqua have been adopted as their colors, and uniforms will be available in those shades in the near future.

"By necessity, we've slowed down a little for the summer," Mrs. Zahn declared. "But in the fall, we're going to expand and really get rolling."