

Report on Willowbrook

Staff Has Fine Esprit de Corps

Says State School Director

The newest, and perhaps least known and understood, of Staten Island's institutions is Willowbrook State School. In the following article the institution's director gives Advance readers a report on what is being done at Willowbrook.

By DR. HAROLD H. BERMAN
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State School



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Willowbrook State School, under the direction of the Department of Mental Hygiene, is now in full possession of its grounds and buildings.

Of the 382 acres, 132 are lawns, besides the woodland. This provides ample space for playground, picnic and park areas. The permanent buildings are modern, fire resistant and designed to serve the patient's needs. Particularly adaptable for infant care and for the crippled are the one-story buildings which afford easy access for outdoor living and sunshine.

Appropriations were made for the erection of six more of these structures. The color scheme, varied throughout, is designed to make the wards and living rooms cheerful and colorful, to make, as far as possible, a congenial and wholesome environment.

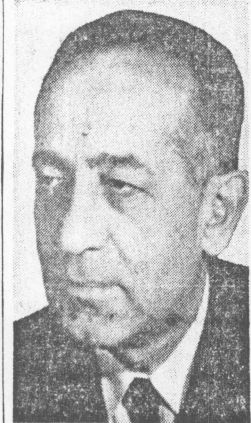
The medical and surgical building affords facilities for complete care of the sick. The school building, utilized every school day, is a very busy place. It is conducive to academic training, occupational therapy, and soon to be inaugurated is a course in home making. Basketball games, gymnastics and daily calisthenics for groups of patients are conducted every day.

The men and women engaged in the operation and maintenance of the school and the employes having direct care of the patients have shown interest and adaptability to a remarkable degree. The esprit de corps, pride in their part of the Willowbrook organization, is developing rapidly. The welfare of the patient is paramount.

In-service training goes on all the time. Many of the personnel have become indoctrinated with the psychiatric attitude; this is noticeably reflected in the care and training of the patients.

Employees now number 853, an increase of 247 over the previous year. The ward service employes have increased by 172 during the past year. The dental department now has two full time dentists, a dental hygienist and two dental assistants. There are 19 doctors on the full time staff and the consulting and attending staff numbering 15 are medical men practicing the various specialties in the community.

INVESTIGATIONS into causes, treatment and prevention of dis-



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ease are carried on by staff members and also in conjunction with medical schools. The facilities of the school are made available for teaching and training purposes for the medical and allied professions.

The registered nurses have raised the level of the care given to the patients to a high degree. They create and maintain a therapeutic environment, so important to the retarded child. They provide him with hope and confidence and themselves derive personal satisfaction.

The rehabilitation unit is actively engaged in treating the retarded physically handicapped. Many of the children are walking and using their hands and arms as a result. They feed themselves and care for themselves which would not have been possible otherwise.

The occupational therapists participate in correcting neuro-muscular disturbances as well as laying the groundwork for motor co-

ordination. The patients' energies are directed into useful channels. They reach the young and the old alike. They bring their skills to the patient in the ward as well as to the patient who can attend the occupational therapy centers. The aim is to treat, train, teach and activate each patient to capacity.

Actually not all patients are capable of benefiting from all the facets of the program. Nevertheless, it is also true that all patients can profit from some phase. Academic classes are conducted for children of school age and plans are in progress to give instruction to some adults. The school curriculum is adapted to the needs of the child and in some respects deviates from the program carried on in the city school system.

Speech is an important function for normal living. An appreciable number of the patients have speech defects. Speech training classes are conducted. It is gratifying to listen to the recordings of the progressive improvement made.

THE PATIENT is not devoid of the pleasure and satisfaction derived from music. Besides choral singing, selected patients are taught to play wind instruments and drums.

good appearance, good taste and good manners to some degree. The board consists of former Judge C. Ernest Smith, president, Staten Island; Mrs. Jacqueline S. Lyons, secretary, Brooklyn; J. Joyce Klinger, Staten Island; Frank A. Pavis, Staten Island; John A. Warner, Manhattan; C. Edward Gideon, Long Island, and John H. Ray, Staten Island.

those in the school band provide entertainment for the other patients. Music is taught to other groups. The musical program is under the direct instruction of a highly qualified music teacher.

Recreation and physical education is a part of the daily living of the patient. Stress is laid on the development of posture and socialization. All suitable patients are trained in sports and games are played in competition with teams from other institutions and outside organizations.

Swimming, roller skating, movies, dances, picnics are other activities. Plays are staged by the patients. There are trips to the Zoo, to Island industries and to the circus and rodeo at Madison Square Garden. These not only afford recreation, but also serve an educational purpose.

Big league baseball games at

the Yankee Stadium, Polo Grounds and Ebbets Field are attended by the youngsters. All this is made possible through the cooperation of various managements of these enterprises and interested individuals and organizations.

Professional musicians and entertainers give of their time and talent for the enjoyment of the patients.

Religious training is part of the total program. Chaplains of the Protestant, Catholic and Jewish faiths minister to the needs of the patients.

Volunteer workers as well as all employes participate in making it a coordinated and integrated program so as to reach the greatest number of patients and yield the best results.

THERE are approximately 3,000

patients at present. There has been an increase in the number of patients during the past year. They are of all ages; many are under five years of age and some are the old. They are of varying physical condition. Some are helpless and will remain so. A good number of physically handicapped will be rehabilitated in whole or in part, but most are in good physical condition and of normal appearance.

The degree of mental retardation also varies. Some are retarded to the point where only the simplest type of habit training can be carried on; others can be taught simple tasks and proper behavior while still others are teachable and trainable so that they will eventually be able to live in the community. Many will not be able to achieve this; nevertheless the aim is to develop