

Open House Set At Willowbrook

An open house program in conjunction with National Mental Health Week will be held tomorrow in Willowbrook State School. Dr. Harold H. Berman, director of Willowbrook, said the public has been invited to tour the school from 1:30 to 4 P. M. Guides will be on hand, he said, to conduct visitors through the buildings.

A feature of the event will be presentation of a concert by the school band in the auditorium of Building 3 as visitors arrive. Visitors will view the school's academic, occupational therapy and recreation departments, as well as children's quarters.

STATEN ISLAND, N. Y., SATURDAY, MAY 7, 1955

Offers Way To Eradicate Mental Ills

If those engaged in the treatment and study of mental disorders "pace themselves with the progress made in other medical specialties," mental illness may one day be eradicated, Dr. Harold H. Berman, director of Willowbrook State School, said yesterday.

In a talk before his staff in conjunction with National Health Week, Dr. Berman reported "much progress" in recent years through the adoption of new developments and methods.

"In the past 25 or 30 years," he said, "we have turned out attention toward active remedial measures. We have practically eliminated mental disorders due to infections of the brain, first by the use of malaria and fever therapy, and now by the use of anti-biotics and the use of vitamins in the treatment of toxic disorders."

He stated: "Our ultimate aim must be to return the treatment of many conditions to the family physician, where it must naturally be made to belong."

STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE
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Willowbrook Workers Hit 'Brutality' Story

By T. G. THOMPSON

Eleven speakers, including four fathers of children taught in Willowbrook State School, last night reaffirmed their confidence in the institution and condemned recent news stories stating that a child had been abused while at the school.

Called as a protest against the adverse publicity, the meeting was attended by more than 100 employees of the school in the Building 3 auditorium on the institution grounds.

In the most impassioned speech of the evening, Irving Reidler, an organizer and past president of the Benevolent Society for Retarded Children, told of his child who was malformed at birth.

Reidler said he so distrusted institutions where his child was confined that for two years he carried a motion picture camera "looking for trouble." He said he had little occasion to use it.

The protest was touched off by a news story published last Tuesday by the Buffalo Courier-Express and relayed to the wire services. It quoted a Buffalo father as saying his 5-year-old daughter had lost weight and received bruises while in the school. He has withdrawn her.

LAST NIGHT another parent, Bert Hartman, whose child died last February, said the school staff had done a "miraculous job" in helping the child before its death.

Frank A. Pavis, a member of the school's Board of Visitors, told the employees: "I'm with you good people. . . This is just another thing which we must go through. We'll come out victorious."

Mrs. Esther C. Wood, assistant professor of psychology and sociology at Wagner College, said that Wagner students doing field work at Willowbrook School have come away "inspired."

Labelling the situation "gossip hysteria," the Rev. Dr. J. Murdoch Palmer, pastor of Mariners Harbor Baptist Church, described Willowbrook employes as "beyond reproach."

"An investigation," said Dr. Palmer, "will give this school the cleanest slate of any school in the country."

HAROLD Herzstein, regional attorney for the metropolitan area of the Civil Service Employees Association, which represents Willowbrook workers, declared the news stories "vicious things."

He said the Buffalo newspaper gave credence first to the story of the parents and didn't get around to "the truth" until the third or fourth day.

The damage, Herzstein said, can't be undone by a "two-inch retraction or a letter to put in your private file." He told the employees: "All you can do is offer a true explanation and not worry about it."

A unanimous vote of confidence by the benevolent society was re-

ported by Lou Hults, who represented the society's board of directors. He is the father of a boy who has been in Willowbrook School since 1949.

William Heisler, vice-president of the benevolent society, commended the employes for their constant vigilance. "You are doing the job that we the parents are unable to do," he said.

STATE Senator Edward V. Curry said the "unwarranted attack" was made by "persons who apparently do not know Willowbrook as I do."

Curry told the group that in this case they needed no defense. "If you ever need it," he declared, "I'll defend you to the last minute."

Former Judge C. Ernest Smith, president of the Board of Visitors, recalled that he had interviewed more than a dozen parents on a recent visiting day and had discovered no complaints.

Dr. Harold H. Berman, director of the school, dismissed the news stories as the statements of "an emotionally disturbed parent."

"We will continue to work to carry out the mission which was charged to us," he said. "Our mission is to find out the cause of retardation. Each year we're closer to the solution."

THOMAS Conkling, president of Willowbrook State School Chapter of the Civil Service Employees Association, in which 575 of the more than 1,000 employes hold membership, presided and introduced the speakers.

Conkling reviewed the publicity from Buffalo and its effect on the school. He read a telegram from the Buffalo newspaper stating that its follow-up reports had found the situation at Willowbrook "quite laudable." Reporters visiting the school, said Conkling, have found it "always open for inspection."