

S.I. School Houses 5,000 Retarded

By EDWIN SADER

"They were all family tragedies," said the doctor, referring to more than 5,000 mentally retarded persons, the great majority of them youngsters, cared for at the Willowbrook State School on Victory Blvd. in Staten Island.

"FROM THE very beginning they were prevented from reaching adult mental levels. Now they must be cared for, and, if practical, returned to the community. But we should never lose sight of our real objective — the eventual elimination of mental deficiency — although it will not be attained in our lifetimes."

Dr. David Berman, director of the school, was speaking. Beside him, in the midst of more than 100 cribs in one ward, stood Florence Goodfield, chief nurse. Several attendants fed babies who had severe physical deformities.

More than 1,000 of the school's occupants are babies. Others include toddlers, teenagers and a few adults. Willowbrook, which cares for the mentally retarded of New York City and Long Island, is one of five such institutions in the state.

"There are 24 buildings on our grounds," says Berman. "But an institution like ours is more than dormitories and classrooms and facilities for the care of the mentally retarded. It is people. Each of our residents must be understood as an individual and treated as one. There are as many distinct personal traits among people of subnormal intelligence as there are among normal ones."

Almost all the school's occupants have IQs below 70. Classes go as high as the fifth grade and are attended by students of varying ages. There are two regular visiting periods every week, but residents can be visited at any time with prior permission.

"THERE ARE few situations sadder and more understandable than the 'say-it-isn't-so' reactions of parents who have learned that their baby is subnormal. They often go from doctor to doctor helplessly seeking good news,

willing to do anything to keep their child out of an institution. Eventually, when the facts are faced, many of them realize that the boy or girl is actually better off here."

Classes at the school involve the simplest of techniques — counting, recognition of colors, reading and writing. It is hoped that eventually, as they grow older, youngsters will be able to perform jobs in the community. Frequently, this is impossible, in which case they remain at the school and perform mental tasks.

"Of course, education is important," notes Dr. Berman. "But this is basically a medical and nursing problem and a problem of training in the most elementary skills of living."

Willowbrook State school opened its doors as a home for retarded children in 1947. Its use for this purpose was delayed during World War II when it became Halloran General Hospital. There are now 1,800 professional and non-professional employees at the school.

FACILITIES include special play rooms, whirl pool baths, medical devices to develop muscular coordination and finger dexterity and an assembly-line set-up for bathing babies.

Many of the children seem quite happy. Some sing songs and play games with gusto. Several perform in a band which seems to play as well as comparable organizations of normal youngsters.

"Besides caring for these youngsters," concludes Dr. Berman, "we are studying them and their case histories, with the hope that we can do something about mental retardation besides putting up more and more buildings these."



Nurse at Willowbrook State School on Staten Island teaches retarded youngster to walk.

Paid Tune For Jukebox

A dozen Staten Islanders who are employed as attendants at Willowbrook State School told the Long Island Jukebox racketeers jury in Nassau County Court yesterday how they suddenly found themselves paying dues to Teamster Local 266—the jukebox local.

It was a change of scene in the seven-week-old trial of East Coast teamster boss John J. O'Rourke of Queens and 14 others accused of seizing control of the jukebox industry. Until yesterday, the jury heard only about the jukebox business.

The 12 attendants, all employed at the state-operated school, said they belonged to Retail Clerks Local 413 until sometime last year.

Their stories varied, except that they all knew that \$2.50 a month was deducted from their pay and most of them said it was for dues for Local 266.

MOST of them knew little or nothing about Local 266, except that they remembered signing a membership application in 1958. Most had never attended a union meeting. Some are still paying the dues, others not.

Thomas Conkling of Brooklyn, the only one not a Staten Island resident, said he is a safety supervisor at the school and is president of the Willowbrook Chapter of the Civil Service Employees Association.

He testified that in April or May of last year, Joseph De Grandis, 53, of M Cayuga Ave. Sunnyside, who is Local 266 president and a defendant in the case, approached him.

He said De Grandis offered him \$100 a week as a Local 266 organizer at Willowbrook, but he turned it down. On cross-examination by De Grandis' attorney, Jacques M. Schiffer, he called De Grandis "an honest labor leader who never did anything against the interests of the Willowbrook employes."

ASSISTANT District Attorney William Cahn asked each witness if he had anything to do with jukeboxes. All said no.

Schiffer pointed out that local 266 includes hearse drivers, nurses and automobile mechanics, and that originally it was organized in 1951 as a municipal and state employes association.

When Mrs. Elizabeth Lambert of 65 Arnold St., New Brighton, was asked if she owns any jukeboxes, she got a round of laughter with "no, I just own a radio and television set."