

Willowbrook's Problem: Overcrowded Buildings

(END OF FOUR ARTICLES)

By MARK WIESNER

About half of the 6,055 persons at Willowbrook State School — men, women, boys, girls — receive weekly visits from parents and relatives.

About half the remainder are visited occasionally. The others are not visited.

The cost of caring for a child at Willowbrook is pegged at \$210 a month. Very few persons pay that rate or anywhere near it. Most pay just a few dollars a month. Some nothing at all.

WILLOWBROOK HAS a certified capacity of 4,500 patients. As stated, its population is 6,055. Moreover, the overcrowding is uneven.

"The baby building is only filled to capacity (about 1,000 children, ages 1 through 5)," Dr. Jack Hammond, Willowbrook's director says. "This capacity is a little more than I would like to see, but I cannot say they are overcrowded."

"The physically handicapped? The buildings are just to capacity or slightly over."

"But the buildings for ambulatory patients age 6 through 18 are markedly overcrowded. Some are almost 100 per cent overcrowded."

Following the second patient death as a result of burns sustained in a scalding shower, the state loosened up and approved the addition of 200 job titles, most in the attendant category.

Despite intensive efforts at filling the job titles, almost all remain open. Even so, how far do 200 persons go spread out over 107 wards and three shifts. In addition, there are jobs open for 65 registered nurses. There are also jobs for a couple of doctors.

"**ORIGINALLY, WE** requested more than 400 job items," Dr. Hammond says. "We con-

sider ourselves very fortunate that we have 200 items approved."

What Dr. Hammond says is vitally needed are what he terms "activity therapists." He includes in this category teachers recreational and other aides who can get the children from the wards and allow the attendants to get on with the tedious, unpleasant but necessary housekeeping chores.

All the brighter ambulatory patients attend school. So me of the others are engaged in some form of activity some of the time.

A LARGE percentage of the ambulatory patients engage in none at all.

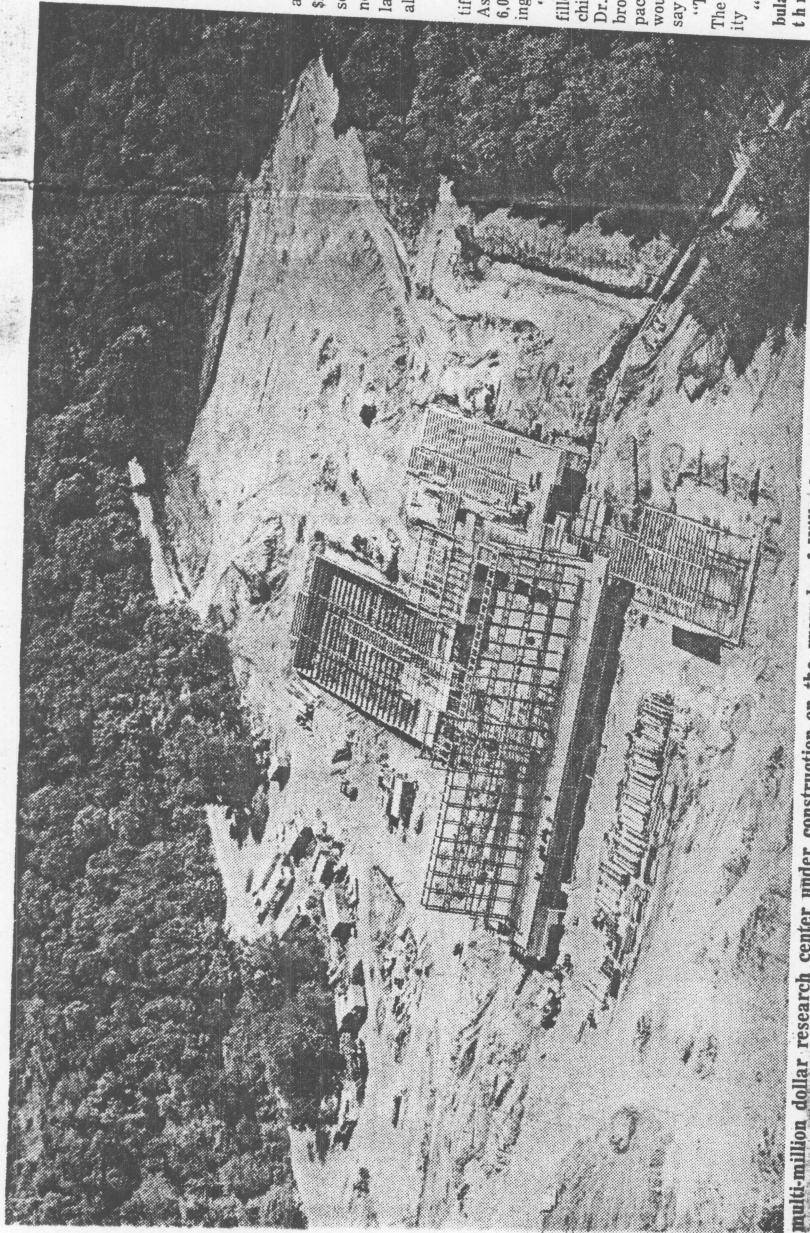
"All the children could benefit to a degree from some form of rudimentary ways.

Overcrowding, a \$13-million a year budget. A need for personnel. Failure of qualified persons to apply for jobs (the ability to read and write is considered the rough equivalent of the grade school educational requirement).

Moreover, Hammond says: "More and more the institution will be filled with lower-grade patients as parents keep the brighter children at home."

"This is how it should be," he added.

But how it should be adds up to a terribly complex problem for the institution. An increasing number of patients will be largely unmanageable, largely unteachable even in the most fit to a degree from some form of rudimentary ways.



multi-million dollar research center under construction on the grounds of Willowbrook State School represents hope that a real breakthrough in the field of retardation will be achieved.

Photo by John Pedulla