

At Willowbrook: Charges Cloud Visiting Day

By MARK WIESNER

Today, another day like all days begins at Willowbrook State School.

More specifically, it's a Sunday like all Sundays. Which isn't bad. Parents visit their retarded children Sundays.

They take them for drives around Staten Island and to drive-ins for hamburgers. The lines of communication between parents-child, between retarded child and his normal brother and sisters—such as they are—are kept open.

Despite the focus of attention on Willowbrook the last two weeks, there's been little alleviation in day-to-day conditions.

The wards for ambulatory patients — where two persons died violent deaths within the last 14 months — continue to be "100 per cent overcrowded."

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IN WARD 9C, where the last death occurred, this means 75 or so low-grade retardates living the kind of existence Sen. Robert F. Kennedy described as "intolerable."

The care they get is custodial, if that. The number of attendants usually there is four on the day shift, three in the evening, and two at night.

The unblinking eye of a TV set is the most constant of companions under these circumstances.

Dr. Jack Hammond, director of Willowbrook, says that a minimum of four attendants are needed there for all shifts, but he can't shift anyone from the other wards where staffing is as minimal.

The patients there are disturbed and overactive.

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IT DOESN'T take much to trigger a fight. Mealtime is especially a provocative period.

There are also jobs open for physicians, registered and practical nurses, teachers, dining room attendants, ground keepers and for one recreational aide.

In all categories except ward attendant, the state is willing to hire parttime workers, if hours can be arranged at all.

Parttime work is ruled out for attendants because of the need to be available for different shifts.

Dr. Hammond said he had received a few letters from persons offering to do volunteer work and a couple from organizations he was following up, but not many.

Help might be in the offing for Willowbrook, but it has not yet arrived.