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How the Handicapped Are Helped

2 Hospitals Well-Kept

By Peter Egan

A tour through Suffolk's two mental hospitals with facilities for children failed to turn up evidence of the "snakepit" conditions Sen. Robert F. Kennedy (D-N.Y.) said he found earlier this month at two state hospitals for retarded children.

About 400 emotionally disturbed children between ages 5 and 16 at the Kings Park and Central Islip State Hospitals live in modern, well kept facilities. A schedule of school and play is reproduced as much as possible by trained personnel.

While Kennedy complained of "filth and dirt" at the Willowbrook State School on Staten Island and the upstate Rome State School, the corridors and rooms in the children's wards at both Suffolk hospitals had the well-washed look of new schools.

Kennedy said he saw many retarded children without education "slipping into blankness and life-long dependence" at the Willowbrook and Rome schools. He said their rooms were "less comfortable and cheerful than the cages in which we put animals in a zoo . . ."

At Kings Park, which has 262 boys and 55 girls, and at Central Islip, with about 80 boys and 40 girls, the children attend school from 9 AM until 3 PM. Except for barred windows, from which the bars are being removed in many cases, and the long corridors of locked doors, a visitor to either Suffolk facility might think he was in a new grade school.

Groups of orderly boys and girls marched from class to class with a supervisor. They were glad to talk to visitors and spoke proudly of what they had done and learned that day. After school the children, who are separated by sex and age, could play or watch television in large airy day rooms located on each floor of the wards.

While many live in wards, none larger than 35 beds, others earned single rooms through good behavior. In the girls' wards there were curtains on some windows and bright-colored spreads covered white beds. Many had dressers in which they kept personal items such as dolls and makeup. The children's clothing at the hospitals was clean and in good condition in contrast to the rags which Kennedy said he saw at the Willowbrook and Rome hospitals.

Kennedy said many children he saw were "condemned to a life without hope." But the youngsters at Central Islip and Kings Park looked to returning home. "I'm going home next Friday," a 14-year-old girl with dark curly hair told Dr. Charles Buckman, director at Kings Park, when he toured the children's ward yesterday. "Early treatment and early release is the key to restoring emotionally disturbed children to society," Buckman said.

The average stay for a child at Kings Park or Central Islip is less than a year, and some have left after three months. Suffolk's other mental hospital, Pilgrim State Hospital, has no facilities for children.

New Building Ends Battle

By Abraham Rabinovich

Melville—A bus traveling from the Bronx next month will deposit 10 boys outside a one-story brick building in the middle of a bulldozer-scarred landscape here.

To the community, their arrival will mark the opening of the Suffolk State School for the Mentally Retarded and the climax to years of controversy. To some boys, it may mean the first sight of the place where they will grow to old age.

Seven years after plans for its construction were announced, touching off protests from some local residents, the \$40,000,000 institution—still only half completed—is ready for its first patients. They will be 10 boys, aged 8 to 14, who will arrive from Bronx State Hospital about Oct. 15. They will be the vanguard of 2,800 patients, male and female and ranging in age from less than a year to more than 70, who will fill the institution to capacity in five years, according to its director, Dr. Edward J. McGuinness.

Patients at the school will be persons whose intellect is limited by brain damage to a maximum IQ of 79. They differ from patients in state mental hospitals who are mentally retarded but have had a malfunction of their thought processes. "Here we take persons who are lacking in some of the basic intellectual functions," Dr. McGuinness said.

Although the institution attempts to train some patients for a return to normal life, less than five per cent will be able to leave for outside jobs, Dr. McGuinness believes. "A good majority will spend the

rest of their lives here," he said. "We will try to provide a pleasant, comfortable area for them to live."

The institution, which spreads across 475 acres just south of Northern State Parkway, will eventually contain 40 buildings including a four-story hospital. It also will have shops for training in home economics, woodwork and other crafts.

The dormitory that will receive the first arrivals was still largely unfurnished yesterday, and paved roads haven't been completed through much of the complex. Tank trucks watered the roads to keep the dust down as scores of workmen applied cinder block skins to the skeletons of new buildings.

The boys who arrive next month are among 650 patients awaiting transfer from the Bronx State Hospital. All originally came from Willowbrook State School on Staten Island. Like all patients who will follow them, Dr. McGuinness said, they will be Long Island residents. Patients will be admitted at the rate of 10 a week until January when a review of the situation will determine whether to speed up or reduce the rate. Direct admission of retarded persons living with their families on Long Island may be possible in a year, when more facilities are available, Dr. McGuinness said.

"Snakepit" conditions attributed by Sen. Robert F. Kennedy (D-N.Y.) to Willowbrook and another state school, said Dr. McGuinness, were the result of overcrowding—"if they exist." Dr. McGuinness said similar situations of alleged neglect were unlikely to occur at the Suffolk school.