

Job Training Studied for Retardates

May 2, 1966
By KENNETH R. FANIZZI

School Superintendent Bernard E. Donovan indicated today that a job training program for mentally retarded youths may be established on Staten Island in a vacant school or portable classrooms.

He said he will look into the possibility of forming classes for 17-to-21-year-old retardates here.

There's no reason why 50 to 75 borough youths should not be included in the occupation training program being expanded by the city's school system, Donovan said.

Training centers are in operation or are being planned for every borough but Staten Island.

Donovan intimated in talks last week with representatives of the Association for the Help of Retarded Children that if such classes cannot be formed by next September he saw no reason why the youngsters couldn't remain in their present special classes.

MENTALLY retarded children usually attend such classes in the public schools until they reach their 17th birthday. Under state regulations, retardates must be educated until age 21.

The Board of Education last week appropriated \$276,000 in its 1966-67 operating budget to set up vocational training centers in the Bronx and Brooklyn. Manhattan already has such a facility and another is scheduled to open in September in Queens.

Parents of mentally retarded children here are hopeful two or three classrooms in vacant PS 17, New Brighton, can be utilized for a training program.

They have been waging a concerted campaign to establish a job training program on Staten Island, claiming the trip to the Manhattan center is too arduous and that too few youngsters are accepted there.

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IN THE PAST four years, only two borough youths have attended the school.

In another development, representatives of more than 20 borough social agencies have joined the parents by contacting federal, state and city legislators seeking their support.

Spearheading the campaign is Robert Gilson, director of the social services department at Willowbrook State School and chairman of the committee on social work and mental retardation for the National Association of Social Workers.

The organization is urging the lawmakers to use their influence to promote the establishment of such centers in all boroughs so large numbers of retarded youths will not be left stranded at age 17.

The association reported that each year 900 mentally retarded pupils enrolled in public schools are usually dropped because of a lack of training facilities. The Island figure is between 15 and 20.

"A sizable proportion of these 'dropouts' is not ready to assume a job or vocational career at this age," Gilson declared.

Retardate Training Outlined to Group

The educational training of a retarded child should begin at pre-school age and continue through his adult life, Robert Gilson, director of social work at Willowbrook State School, said last night. Speaking to the Parents, Teachers and Friends of Retarded Children at a meeting in the headquarters of the Staten Island Aid for Retarded Children, West Brighton, Gilson pointed out that the education of a retardate should be continual if he is to become an active and contributing member of the community.

Editorials

Too Temporary

News that the opening of a new facility in Suffolk County this summer will achieve some alleviation of overcrowding at Willowbrook State School is encouraging. It is expected that some 400 of the more than 5,500 patients at Willowbrook will be transferred there.

The trouble is that there may be another 400 unfortunates already seeking admission to Willowbrook. If they are admitted the institution will have its crowding problem all over again.

Portable buildings, each of which houses 30 patients, are a temporary answer. Ten are already under construction, and the Department of Mental Hygiene is seeking funds for 30 more. But permanent construction must be authorized soon. The mentally retarded deserve decent housing as much as any one else.