

SERVE Project Helps Keep Island's Elderly Busy, Helpful

By SANDRA FREED

As the human lifespan increases and the average age of retirement grows younger, the big question facing the nation's so-called "senior citizens" is: "What shall I do for the next 10 or 15 years?"

Part of the answer might be found in a three-year research and demonstration project aimed at giving persons of retirement age a chance to serve their community through volunteer work.

The project — SERVE (Serve and Enrich Retirement by Volunteer Experience) will be conducted by the Community Service Society of New York. It will be financed by a federal grant and matching funds contributed by the society.

The grant from the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare's administration on aging came after a pilot survey was made in coopera-

tion with the Staten Island Community Chest and Council.

Staten Island was selected for the survey, said Mrs. Janet Sainer, project director, because it is a representative American community.

The survey revealed that 38 agencies and institutions on Staten Island need additional volunteers and are willing to use older persons for regular service.

SERVE will test ways of recruiting, training, placing and retaining retired persons as regular volunteers.

"Those who have a genuine interest in helping others—whether skilled or unskilled, with or without previous volunteer experience—will find a suitable opportunity for service in established Staten Island agencies," Mrs. Sainer said.

Because transportation difficulties interfere with volunteer activities for some older persons, SERVE will provide transportation for groups of regular volunteers. Buses will

pick up groups at central meeting places.

SERVE has opened an office at 56 Bay St., St. George, staffed by Miss Ethel W. Jacobs, project coordinator, and Mrs. Harold W. Reisch of Westerleigh, program assistant.

One fulltime research person will be hired to compile data about the project, at the request of HEW.

Continuing as a part of SERVE will be a volunteer group which was organized during the pilot study. The group, which now totals about 70 volunteers, travels several times each week to Willowbrook State School.

The volunteers serve as teacher aides, care for young children, help feed the physically handicapped, work in the sewing room, stamping room, carpentry shop or game room.

The project has been an overwhelming success, Mrs. Sainer said. In addition to proving that the retired per-

sons could fulfill tasks at the hospital that otherwise would not be done, it resulted in new friendships and a new interest in life for many of them.

The volunteers came from the Stapleton and West Brighton Day Centers for Older Persons, Mariners Harbor Houses and Catholic Senior Guild.

Mrs. Sainer noted other institutions or groups who have expressed interest in SERVE are the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital, Clifton, the city Department of Health, Staten Island Mental Health Society and Sea View Hospital and Home.

Mrs. Sainer said that definite efforts will be made to reach "isolates"—older persons who do not participate in group activities for older persons—ings.

Through the project, the Community Service Society will seek to develop guidelines for the use of other communities throughout the country.