

Classes for Retarded Aim at Role in Society

First of two articles on educating the mentally retarded.

By ROLLANDA COWLES

"Some of our former students are working in the community and attending evening classes now."

The statement made by Mrs. Hannah Glasser of Willowbrook State School would carry little weight under normal circumstances.

But to anyone involved in the field of mental retardation, it is a giant step in the annals of this particular handicapped segment of our population.

The unsung strides that have been made in the education of the mentally retarded in Willowbrook are due largely to a dedicated teaching staff, headed by the West Brightonite, as director of education.

The public only recently has awakened to the fact that many mentally retarded children can become potentially useful citizens—given the opportunity.

The general aim at Willowbrook, which is the largest institution of its kind in the United States, is to prepare the retarded child to fit into society, when and if that time comes, Mrs. Glasser explained.

A veteran teacher, who interrupted her career to raise three sons of her own, Mrs. Glasser reentered the field of education at Willowbrook in 1952 as one of a three-member faculty.

She became education supervisor in 1958 and was appointed to her present position in 1964. Since then, the teaching personnel of 33 has more than doubled.

Mrs. Glasser credits her staff

Along the Education Front

of 73 teachers and four education supervisors, Joshua Carlo, Mrs. Dolores Mason, Miss Louise Halloran and Mrs. Athena Puryear, for much of the progress the school has been making.

The program involves some 1,098 retardates for whom 91 classes are held daily. Twenty-five of the children are under age 5. The others fall in the 5 to 21 school-age bracket, as prescribed by the state.

The majority is from the Greater New York area, Mrs. Glasser noted.

How is rehabilitation accomplished at Willowbrook?

The goal, the educator explained, is to bring all the retarded children up to their full potential, to make them flexible in their relationship with others, and to develop self-independence and vocational competence so as to make them useful members of society.

A child is screened for school placement according to his individual needs.

Those who are capable of profiting from an academic education are put in "educable" classes, where, besides the three Rs, they are given training for social living and vocational guidance.

The students are grouped according to their chronological age, mental age and social maturity, Mrs. Glasser pointed out.

Classes, consisting of an average of 15 pupils, are conducted mornings and afternoons.

Approximately 334 pupils, in 10 educable classes and nine trainable classes, attend the school on a full-time basis.

An additional 100 advanced students spend half a day in regular classroom studies and the other half in learning vocational skills. The graduation age is 16.

The skills of their choice will be reinforced when they enter the young adult program, which provides on-the-job training on the school grounds with teacher supervision.

Each child is promoted according to his own rate of speed. The Metropolitan Achievement test, teacher evaluation and teacher-supervisor conferences are gauges for promotion, Mrs. Glasser explained.

The curriculum in the "trainable" department is based on self-help, with an accent on socialization, language development and motor coordination in order to develop the students' self-sufficiency and raise them to their fullest potential, Mrs. Glasser stated.

In addition, special provisions are made for the child with added physical handicaps, she pointed out.

Boiling it down to figures, the school conducts classes for 260 educables; 636 trainables; 32 partially sighted; 14 with a hearing deficiency; 106 with cerebral palsy and 50 chosen for a federal project.