

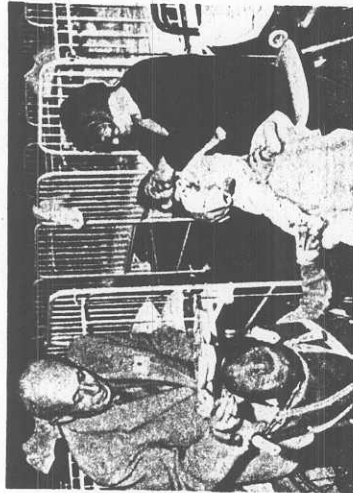
# mainly for seniors

By JACK LEAHY

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Bertha Haagensen, 83 and a member of SERVE, gives aid to a mentally retarded girl at Willowbrook State School.



It's feeding time at the school as James Gallagher, 68, and Mrs. Ethel Pollack, 62, help nurses in the baby ward.



Mrs. Edna Harris, 86, puts a little music in the lives of Willowbrook patients. She is a retired jazz pianist.

## They also SERVE

A THREE-YEAR PILOT project to demonstrate the effectiveness of older volunteer workers has been started on Staten Island by the Community Service Society of New York. Dubbed SERVE (Serve and Enrich Retirement by Volunteer Experience), the program grew out of a survey made in 1966 which revealed that 38 agencies and institutions on Staten Island needed volunteer help and were willing to accept oldsters.

"It should be obvious to both the community and to older adults themselves that volunteer service is of mutual value," says SERVE director Mrs. Janet Sainer. "Unfortunately, this is not so.

"As a general statement, I think it is fair to say that most senior citizens are reluctant to volunteer because they are afraid of being rebuffed. They do not seek out opportunities for voluntary work just as they do not seek salaried employment opportunities because in the past, they have found that doors are not always open to them. We hope to open those doors."

The first institution to benefit from project SERVE was the Willowbrook State School for mentally retarded persons. Every Monday morning, a bus chartered by the Community Service Society picks up a group of about 40 volunteers

at the West Brighton and Stapleton Day Centers for Older Persons and takes them to the school. On Thursday mornings, a similar group is taken from the Mariners Harbor housing project.

At Willowbrook, the volunteers care for and feed tots in the baby wards, act as teacher aides, work in the carpentry shop, sort clothing for distribution to the patients, and perform a variety of other tasks. In the course of their work, the volunteers very often develop strong attachments for "their" children.

"I hadn't seen one little girl for about a month," says James Gallagher, a retired postman. "While I was feeding another child, this girl came up and kissed me right on the cheek. I said, 'Good heavens, you're kissing me right here in front of all these people.' She was tickled by my teasing and I was delighted that she even remembered me. I like so much to see progress in these children."

In the near future, SERVE volunteers are scheduled to be put to work on behalf of the Staten Island Mental Health Society, the Board of Health, the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital and Sea View Hospital. The program is limited to Staten Island because that borough is considered to be the one which is most similar

to other communities in the United States. When project SERVE is completed in 1969, its findings on methods of recruitment, training and placement of older people in meaningful volunteer service will be made available to social welfare agencies throughout the country.

While retired teachers, nurses and other professional personnel are especially sought, prospective volunteers need not have any special skill or previous experience in this type of endeavor. According to Mrs. Sainer, the main qualification is merely the desire to be helpful.

"Before we ask people to make any commitments as volunteers," says Mrs. Sainer, "we take them on a placement tour of the institution or agency where they may someday be assigned. This gives our staff and the individual volunteer a good idea of the type of job for which he or she may be best suited. The needs are so great that there is a role for anyone who has the time and the will."

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