

Children Limited

Published by The National Association for Retarded Children — Dedicated to the Welfare of the Mentally Retarded of All Ages

VOLUME 16 NUMBER 4
AUGUST 1967

Willowbrook Produces Dramatic Improvements

State School's Program Helps Retarded Children With Governmental Help

Four Month's Concentrated Care Brings Amazing Changes

This is a story of what a much-maligned — and sometimes deservedly so — institution was able to do in four months with 50 retarded children when it had the funds.

STATEN ISLAND, N. Y. — Willowbrook State School here is the largest residential institution for the mentally retarded in the country, with more than 5,700 patients. Admissions have been closed because of severe overcrowding and patients now are admitted only when a vacancy occurs.

The overcrowding and understaffing have created a situation where the majority are deprived of training that would contribute to their development. Because of limited personnel, only the most able can obtain some degree of training.

Patients who are overactive, disturbed, destructive, not toilet trained (or partially toilet trained) and require help in feeding, dressing and undressing usually are the "rejected" types.

Because of their limitations, they are not suitable to participate in the present programs of education, recreation and occupational therapy.

Kennedy Castigates Willowbrook

U. S. Senator Robert Kennedy of New York toured the institution and castigated it for the conditions that he found. The staff replied that it could do much more if it had the money and the facilities and personnel that additional funds could provide.

Some of these funds were forthcoming last year when the U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare's Division of Mental Retardation made a \$100,000 yearly grant, subject to annual renewal, for a 10-year period in which to take 50 patients as a target for intensive training to achieve maximum potentials.

State Helps Project

The grant did not cover the entire cost of the project. The New York State Department of Mental Hygiene is subsidizing the rest.



Children have learned enough coordination to join game of 'Ring Around the Rosie'

The program began last September with 50 children between five and nine years of age, with I.Q.s between 20 and 49. All were ambulatory and in reasonably good physical condition. Most were not toilet trained, required help with feeding and dressing and were overactive.

They were placed in a newly-constructed, pre-fabricated building and housed in two wards, each consisting of a dayroom, classroom, dormitory and adequate toilet and bathing facilities. A special staff was assigned to the children full or part-time.

The staff consisted of a physician, 32 attendants, a secretary, a dining room attendant, a housekeeper and a porter.

Laundry facilities, food and food preparation are supplied by the State, as well as clothing, medical and dental attention.

The project had six purposes:
To develop skills and abilities in severely retarded, disturbed children by means of intensive training.
To prevent deterioration and regression.

To develop personalities in the children that would make their lives happy and fruitful.
To develop methods of treatment and training.

To develop a large number of attendants who would help introduce the program in other areas of Willowbrook.

To change the entire aspect of the institution from a custodial place to a dynamic unit for treatment and rehabilitation.

The children received one hour of academic, occupational therapy and recreational classes each day. In free hours, group activity is carried on through games, songs and instruction that the group leader has learned from the teacher. Younger children nap for an hour.

The children stay in the program as long as they continue to profit. When they acquire all the training that the program seeks to impart, they are promoted out of the unit into the general population of Willowbrook and are followed for some period to see if their training habits are maintained.

Personnel attached to the program are rotated out every six months and sent to areas where other children of similar type need their attention.

Within four months the following observations have been made.

The children are much more manageable.

Destruction of equipment has been eliminated.

A marked decrease in the amount of illness has been noted.

Personal appearance has improved. Coveralls have been discontinued.

Muscular coordination and manual dexterity have improved.

The children have developed a sense of independence.

Six children have been promoted out of the project.

But, these generalities become specific when the following statistics are examined. "After" is only four months after the program began.



Teacher helps child learn about her body



This boy has learned to brush his teeth



Girl has learned cleanliness at mealtime



Girls lend each other a helping hand, part of living together in cooperative spirit

Activity	Before	After
Toilet trained	9	23
Can wash face and hands	5	37
Brush teeth	0	37
Abusive	20	9
Able to speak simply	10	27
Can respond and understand	35	45
Participate in activities	23	44
Enjoy activities	34	46
Show interest in environment	36	46
Friendly	26	44
Exercise capabilities of learning	26	46
Feed themselves somewhat	30	46
Dress and undress themselves	11	37
Mix well with peers	15	42