

Special Care Starts Them On Their Way

By MAXINE SITTS

A training program at Willowbrook State School for severely retarded children which involves intensive 24-hour-a-day care and strictly organized learning activities is a success, according to an evaluation report.

The report, which covers the progress of the first year of the Hospital Improvement Program, notes that over half of the children, ranging in age from 4 to 9, have progressed sufficiently to be promoted out of the program.

When 50 children entered the training in September of last year, practically none could wash their hands and face, brush their teeth or feed themselves, according to Dr. Milton Jacobs of Stapleton, who is in charge of the program.

The youngsters have IQs ranging from the 20s to the low 30s. Many were not able to speak, nor could they understand and respond to questions.

The Willowbrook plan, which received a \$100,000 federal grant from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, took the 50 children, and put them in new cheerful prefabricated buildings with two wards, each containing a day-room, classroom, dormitory and toilet and bathing facilities.

An occupational therapist, recreation director and teacher work with the children in groups of 10. However, most important to the youngsters, according to Dr. Jacobs, is their "mother image"—attendants who are assigned to groups of 10 children full time.

Federal funds cover the professional staff and 10 attendants, but state funds are used to provide additional attendants, and building facilities.

According to a progress report, 11 of the 50 original children were promoted out of the program during the year. They reached a point, according to Dr. Jacobs, where they could care for themselves adequately, and where the professional staff felt they would not regress if they were placed with the general population in the school.

New children were admitted when the 11 left, bringing the total children in the program to 61. Of these, 36 (another 25 are leaving this month) have been promoted.

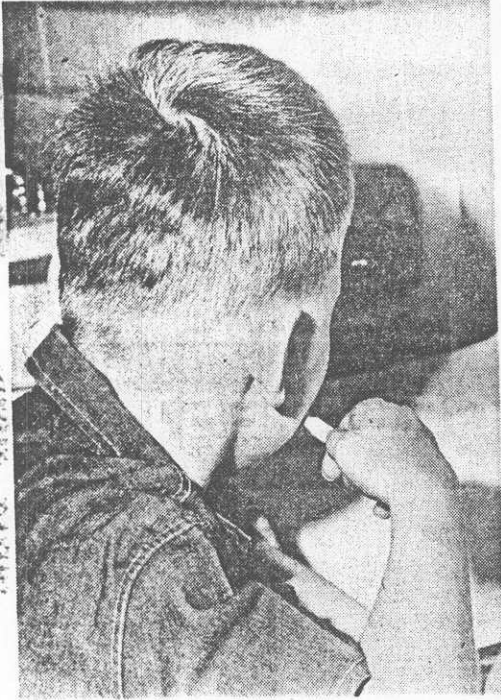
Some of the program's accomplishments: nine of the original 50 were toilet-trained

when they entered; now 27 are completely trained and 15 are partly trained. Nine could dress themselves; now 38 can. Ten could wash their hands and faces; now 42 can. Three could brush their teeth; now 42 can.

These and other figures illustrating the program's success will be submitted to the Health, Education and Welfare's mental retardation department. They assure that the grant will be renewed for another year. Willowbrook can receive the money for 10 years on a renewal basis.

Not only children, but attendants as well are learning with HIP. Children's "mothers" are rotated into regular school programs every six months, taking with them the experience of the intensive training.

"Most important is that these children are using their potential to learn," explained Dr. Jacobs. "They are not normal kids, but they are being brought to their maximum potential."



A new skill, like brushing teeth, a proud achievement for the 4-to 9-year-olds.

S.I. Advance Photos by John Padula



Many of the children in the intensive training program learned to dress themselves in a few months.



Self-help for young Willowbrook State School children begins with clean face and hands.