

Day at Willowbrook School: Big Jobs, Little Tasks



Joseph Schofield, left, engineer in charge of construction of a new 33-classroom building at Willowbrook, explains blueprints to Dr. Jack Hammond, director.

By MAXINE SITTS

A lot of things can happen in a day at Willowbrook State School—from wiping masks and patatoes off eyeglasses to addressing a dozen experts in mental retardation.

Dr. Jack Hammond, director of the 5,500-patient institution, is certain of only one thing as he enters his large office each morning—that today will never be the same as yesterday.

On a recent Thursday, he began the day by meeting with a number of psychiatrists, psychologists and other experts in mental retardation from hospitals and colleges throughout the city.

The group was meeting at Willowbrook to conclude a year's review of a random sampling of nearly 500 patients at the institution. Their objective—to discover if any of the 2,000 patients were ready to enter the community life.

They had a number of questions for Hammond—and he was kept busy returning to his extensive files in his office for more data.

"Most people," he said, "believe that once a patient enters here, he will never turn to society. On the contrary, we are constantly reviewing patients' progress and capabilities."

Back in his office, Hammond answered a request from Harvard University for information on Willowbrook's hospital improvement program which is geared to educate severely retarded children through intensive training.

"I don't know how they found about this—maybe they saw that the federal government was giving us money. At any rate, they want data on the program," he noted proudly.

The program, called Toddler Training and Stimulation for Maximum Potential, directed by Dr. Milton Jacobs, was declared a success recently at the end of the first year of operation.

To keep files up to date, Hammond reviewed personnel changes at Willowbrook. Since 1964, teachers have increased from 33 to 118; nurses from 73 to 200; attendants from 1,400 to 2,000; specialized therapists from 27 to 151.

Special training, which used to begin at age seven, now starts as early as age three, he noted.

Later on that recent Thursday, Hammond toured part of the school's toddler training program to speak with an engineer. Nearby, he pointed out cleared land which may be used for six reeducating buildings, each accommodating 96 patients in eight classrooms.



Teaching children to feed themselves is an important part of training programs at Willowbrook.

On this particular day, Hammond was able to do one of his favorite things—visit some of the younger patients at Willowbrook.

"Good morning," Dr. Hammond chanted, as he entered a classroom. In the dining room, he helped a three-year-old girl feed herself. That's when the glasses got covered, regional advisory committee of the State Planning Commission is active in the Mayor's Committee for the Mentally Retarded, which he was asked to join during the summer.

He also recently joined the Children's State Planning Committee for Comprehensive Statewide Vocational Rehabilitation Services and is on the board of directors of the Staten Island Aid for Retarded Children.



Hammond stops by to discuss the noon meal with Reinhold Heider, a cook at Willowbrook.