

SERVE visitors brighten scene at Willowbrook

By JANE KURTIN

Anyone who doubted, four years ago, that the SERVE project at Willowbrook State School, Willowbrook, would work out, has been proven wrong.

In 1966, 22 retirees arrived at the school as volunteers and were assigned to a variety of duties involving assignments which they had chosen. Thus, the Serve and Enrich Retirement by Volunteer Experience, got under way.

At the time, in a SERVE newsletter, the hope was expressed that these men and women most of whom are in their 70s, would show an "enthusiasm and willingness to see and respond to the needs of the patients and the institution" and thus develop their placements.

The wish expressed in that newsletter has been amply fulfilled. The SERVE staff at the school has grown from the original 23 to 564 volunteers who regularly give their time to the largest facility for the mentally retarded in the United States. Some SERVE volunteers

give direct one-to-one service while others provide equally needed indirect service.

Those working indirectly with the patients spend time with them in the sewing room, the warehouse and the supply room and, it was reported in a recent newsletter, "get to know and understand the residents and develop friendships which are meaningful to everyone."

As one volunteer explained it: "Stamping clothes in Building 61 has been something I look forward to. It is a comfortable feeling when I approach the building and find the patients actually looking for me."

Initially, only one volunteer expressed the desire to work directly with an individual patient. As time has passed, more and more have gone into this type of work particularly in the institution's baby building.

A SERVE member who has worked on a person-to-person basis with patients reminisced: "When I volunteered for the children,

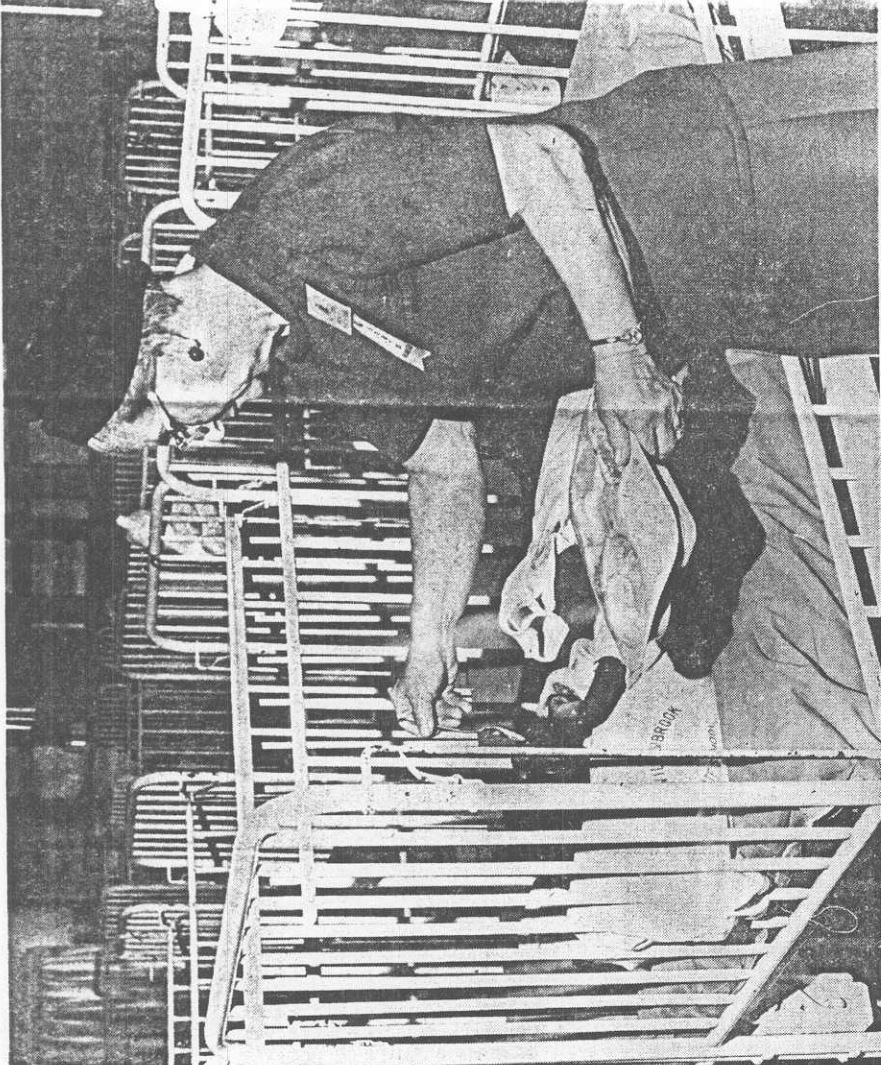
I found that it was not easy work, but I didn't want to be a quitter. Now I go twice a week there and the love of these patients is very rewarding."

One of the most important additions to the recruitment techniques for SERVE members, has been the recruitment of others by satisfied volunteers.

"Each one bring one," the theme for recruiting, has resulted in the addition of at least one new volunteer almost every week who is welcomed enthusiastically by staff and co-volunteers and then placed appropriately.

Aside from the innumerable services which they bring to Willowbrook State School, SERVE volunteers have become goodwill ambassadors to the community and major suppliers of needed materials collected annually for use in the occupational therapy shops.

After what was recorded as a "tentative beginning," SERVE volunteers have established themselves as an integral part of the school and, equally important, the school has become a part of each volunteer.



Mrs. Fanny Rivelli, one of many SERVE volunteers in the children's wing of Willowbrook State School feeds a bedridden youngster.

