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Child Neglect in Job Freeze

Stirs Willowbrook Fund Rally

By GENE SPAGNOLI

Aroused parents, angered by the "shocking" cut in care for the youngsters at Willowbrook State School in Staten Island, plan a demonstration to rally support for more funds at 2 p.m. today at the institution.

Murray Schneps, a member of the board of directors of the Willowbrook Chapter of the Association for Retarded Children, said: "The situation since the job freeze was instituted a year ago is nearly unbelievable. The hospital, which was under staffed when the freeze was put on, has lost more than 500 members of the staff since then and none of them has been replaced."

Mrs. Evelyn Weisenfeld, a chapter member, said that some youngsters were not being fed because of the staff shortage and that some of the buildings do not have the minimum staff of two persons per ward.

"A few of the wards have as many as 90 children."

There seems to be no disagreement as to the gravity of the situation.

Citizen Group Appalled

The Board of Visitors, a seven-member group of citizens appointed by Gov. Rockefeller, sent him a letter on Oct. 28 noting they were "shocked and appalled at the conditions" they found on a recent visit.

The chairman, Lee Landes, said the board had asked the governor to "give immediate consideration to the problem."

The hospital director, Dr. Jack Hammond—who was praised highly by Schneps, Weisenfeld and Landes—agreed that the situation is "very critical."

"We can't give the patients the care that they need," he said.

"All state institutions are understaffed because of the shortage of funds," he said. "We have lost about 500 employees and I've only been able to replace about 20 after some strenuous argument."

Referring to a charge by the parents that children in one ward were found "naked and starving" on one visit, Hammond said: "That was an unusual

situation because the laundry broke down and there just weren't enough clothes on hand."

He said the hospital was "always low on clothing" and said the situation is made worse because some of the patients rip up their clothes.

The Helpless Go Hungry

As for the feeding, he said: "We just do not have enough help to give the helpless patients enough time to be fed properly." He emphasized that some patients had to be fed individually and noted that such a procedure takes a lot of time.

Hammond said the staff shortage was compounded by a lot of absenteeism, with an average of 100 employees a day being out."

This means, he added, that personnel has to be reassigned daily so as to have "at least the minimum help for each ward."

Mrs. Weisenfeld said she expected at least 300 parents to gather at the hospital's administration building, at Victory Blvd. and Richmond Ave. to talk to the many visitors expected.

"There must be some way we can treat these children like human beings," she said.