

Staten Island Advance

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Willowbrook:

Inside the cages

By JANE KURTIN

The boys in Building A pick at the sores on their naked bodies during the endless days they spend on wooden benches, curled on the floor or leaning against the walls of their ward.

They don't understand the indignity of being perpetually naked or the repulsiveness of their drooling. They don't understand that people are afraid to touch them.

Showers are given communally in open stalls. Beds are jammed into massive rooms and stand not more than 12 inches apart. Possessions, if these severely retarded boys have any, are not visible — only row upon row of institutional white iron beds.

Called for lunch, the 60 or so young men responded at once. In a single, chaotic wave, they rushed for the door which would open and eventually lead

to a nurse's station. The nurse might learn, employees explained, has to come to them from normal persons. But normal persons aren't rushing into Willowbrook State School to help and the employees can't.

One case of a young man we'll call Alan, who created problems for already overtaxed employees was told by a member of the professional staff this way:

"Alan's record shows that for quite a while before he was put in seclusion he was having

problems in school. The significant thing about this is that he was in school and of an IQ which deemed him educable.

"Eventually, Alan bit one of the female attendants who couldn't handle him, and in May of 1969 he was put in seclusion.

"In January of this year, a letter was sent to James J. Murphy, deputy director here at Willowbrook, from another ranking official in the institution.

"The letter informed Murphy that Alan had been in seclusion for over a year and that his condition had deteriorated drastically because of his isolation.

"Murphy was apprised of the fact that Alan ate, slept, urinated and defecated in one room and that he should have been transferred to another building where attendants would be able to deal with him.

Eventually, after a long