

Readers tell us their opinions about Willowbrook

Here is a sampling of some of the mail the Advance has received since it began publishing articles on conditions at the Willowbrook State School:

She's grateful for stories

Thank you, thank you, thank you for those articles you are writing about conditions at Willowbrook State School.

While our tax dollars are going toward welfare for people capable of working but are too lazy, these poor unfortunate children are living like animals. Maybe your articles will open the public's eyes. Since your articles started I have been doing nothing but crying. I had a child who would have been 3 in January. I thank God she died this past February for she would have been part of this hell on earth.

MRS. N. SCHIAVONE,

132 Kelvin Ave.,
Bay Terrace

Attendants

perform well

We are social workers at Willowbrook State School and are well acquainted with living conditions in this institution. The ward attendants at Willowbrook and especially in Building 6 are dedicated and hard working. We know that many of them have formed deep affections for the children, buy them clothes, food and presents, out of their own salaries and even bring some children, who have no families, to their own homes on holidays.

We know that the real problems in Building 6 and in the rest of Willowbrook are caused by the lack of money. Even before the budget cuts in April 1971 there was not enough money provided by New York State to provide enough attendants and other staff, adequate living quarters and

meaningful training programs for any of the residents of Willowbrook, but especially for older, retarded persons in buildings such as six.

We know that the ward attendants in Building 6, and other buildings for youths and adults, desperately want to train the children but are not able to because there are too many residents in a ward, too few attendants and practically no training equipment or programs.

We also know that the parents of the children understand the nature of the problem. They know how difficult it is to care for and train one severely retarded child and how impossible it is for attendants to care for and train 60 retarded people in a ward.

Any progress which a child fortunate enough to be in a training program makes, is often lost when he is transferred to a building with practically no training programs. This is not the fault of ward attendants but the fault of those citizens and legislators who refuse to provide the money to run a state school properly.

It is, in fact, a miracle that ward attendants in Building 6 and throughout the institution have not become completely discouraged but keep trying to do an almost impossible job.

ELIZABETH LEE,

350 Willow Rd.W.,
Graniteville

IRA FISHER,

41 Coughlin Ave.,
West Brighton

Programs instituted

When I finished reading the articles, I was amazed. I have been an employe at Willowbrook State School for 11 years and have worked in several areas of the institution. In that time there have been many new programs instituted through the untiring efforts of the director.

If the author of the article had taken the time to tour all

of the areas at Willowbrook personally, she might have found some pleasant surprises. Sunday afternoon the newest unit to be opened at Willowbrook had open house for the parents and relatives of its residents. The education, occupational therapy, and speech teachers gave their own time to come in and speak with the visitors and explain their programs and their work with the children. This unit was described in the Advance several months ago, and it has grown in the past year due to the dedication of its employes and education department.

Let's be fair to the administration, patients and employes. See the whole picture before you condemn the reviews. Remember, too, if the parents were able to cope with their child at home, Willowbrook and other institutions would not have 5,200 patients. Yes, there is an overcrowding and there is understaffing due to the freeze and to the attrition of many employes. However, there are many dedicated employes there who the public never hears about. I am speaking of the ones who take patients home, launder their clothes and provide home-made birthday cakes and treats on their days off. Many children have been placed at Willowbrook who have never received a visit from a parent or relative, and the attendants try to compensate for this.

Yes, there is a shortage of laundry. Many of the children are destructive, and much is worn out and unable to be replaced due to budget cuts. No child at Willowbrook is starved as your article claimed. Our food supply is computed at Albany, and the amount sent down is calculated to provide a balanced diet. Many of our children are "food grabbers" and if allowed to do so, would consume an unhealthy amount of food. It is most unfair to place the blame on Willowbrook or any other institution for something they have no control over and that is decreed by Albany.

Anyone who has had the privilege of seeing the "children" of Willowbrook perform at their Christmas show or at the annual Benevolent Society's luncheon knows the good things that are accomplished here. Perhaps some of the community could be made aware by your articles of the good people and the hard work that is done here. I am sure if the senior citizens group or more properly called SERVE were asked, they could give a resume of how much help they give to Willowbrook and what they see. They, too, provide love and help to many children with their weekly visits.

I can't help wondering if the doctor mentioned has ever been to the "Congo" to make the assertion he did. If these diseases are foreign to the "civilized world", then what is the need for the tropical disease centers located as far away as New York City? Why is research being done to combat so many diseases prevalent today if as he claims they are not known in the civilized world?

MRS. PATRICIA LAMB, R.N.,
Willowbrook State School,
Staten Island

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Knows facts

first-hand

It is about time that you have finally touched upon the very important subject of the conditions at Willowbrook State School. Since I worked there a few years ago, I know, first hand, how bad the conditions really are.

Maybe by bringing this to the attention of the people of Staten Island, there may be some people who will investigate what is truly going on and what can be done by them, and by County, City and State officials.

While working at Willowbrook, I helped with the recreation in Building 20 along with Richie Bardsley also hired as summer help. Both of us working together, played baseball, took the patients to the