

It's your opinion

Thursday, December 2, 1971

Lend a hand at Willowbrook

I'm sure that Willowbrook State School, like any other large institution, has shortcomings, hazards, etc., and may seem depressing to some, but just take these children home and see just how unsafe, unhealthy and depressed their lives will become.

How many of our so-called complainers attended shows put on by the children themselves or have seen the faces of those attending, who were dressed and transported to the auditorium by the attendants? I've seen many programs; I've seen no public there or any of our dignitaries. These kids love their shows and company.

There are many affairs, there and outside also. Not too many people attend. Why? Because it's depressing. These kids do not need your sympathy. They need love, audiences and maybe for a social group to go sing carols, or give a small candy and ice cream party or just a visit and a ride around, as many never have a visit.

I am mother of a 19-year-old girl who has been at Willowbrook for 12½ years. My daughter has always been happy, educated for her mental ability and been treated just fine. My daughter sings in the Glee Club, which travels all around to sing. Mr. Lambert, their leader, is the most dedicated man I have ever met. The kids just worship him and he loves every one of them. Some of these singers are blind and some have very low mentality but they sing together harmoniously. They are great. They have a wonderful band, better than some so-called hit bands and their leader, Mr. Lombardi, has been with them since the opening of Willowbrook.

My point in writing this letter is, why shop around for the worst? Why not also look for the good done there and the good conditions? Go look at some of the other buildings. My

daughter is in Building 32 and it's better than some of the readers' homes, and they're not hungry either.

We need more staff, more room and more community participation there, but when a state finds it necessary to cut back and starts doing it with mental institutions, we all should start to wonder what we pay for and what kind of state we live in.

These kids need a little attention from the public in any way they feel they can help. Search your minds. This is the holiday season. Remember just one child at Willowbrook who has no one and your Christmas will be much brighter.

MRS. WALTER DECKER JR.
83 Laurel Ave.,
Stapleton

Saturday, December 4, 1971

Certification abets problem

I note that in the Nov. 24 issue of the Advance you quote Dr. Richard Nauen, assistant commissioner of the Department of Health in the New York City Affairs Branch, to the effect that he sent copies of his findings as to whether Willowbrook can meet state health standards to Dr. Jack Hammond and the chairman of the board of visitors.

As a member of the board of visitors I have never seen any such report nor has such report ever been made to us to my knowledge.

I might add that Willowbrook is not alone in being unable to meet health standards in the state. I should say most of the institutions for the mentally retarded cannot meet such standards, but nevertheless are certificated by the Department of Health for Medicaid and Medicare. Perhaps if the Department of Health did its duty properly and did not certificate these institutions, the state would see fit to spend the

necessary money to make them meet the qualifications and give these helpless "residents" the care they deserve and their parents expect when they have to send them away from home.

JOSEPH T. WEINGOLD,
Member, Board of Visitors,
Willowbrook State School
175 5th Ave.,
Manhattan

(Editor's note: Mr. Weingold is also executive director of the New York State Association for Retarded Children)

Employe calls articles lies

I feel that I must at least answer your lies on the situation at Willowbrook State School. I have been employed there for 21 years, almost 22. How long was your reporter assigned there? Isn't it a fact that when your reporter was offered to visit the various buildings she refused? Could it be that she was afraid to see the truth? I would have welcomed her, unannounced, in my building. The articles are a pure example of "yellow journalism."

Fifteen years ago, I would have said nothing, it was true, a simple case of a custodial institution where the floors were given better care and attention than the boys and girls. Nor is this the first institution I have worked in, having worked two years previously at the Training School at Vineland, N.J., where only moron residents are accepted and must be able to care for themselves before being considered for admission.

I grant you we do not have enough chairs and tables; but is this our fault or the powers that be in Albany who care less what is going on when they cut the budget — not theirs, only ours?

If your articles were meant to help, they didn't. My employes state, and rightly so, since we are given the credit for doing nothing, then we should do nothing. Is this what