

Willowbrook

Our children



Some patients, fortunate enough to be chosen for special training programs, respond to painstaking efforts of their teachers. When they're too big or too old for the "baby-buildings," many will end up in barren wards.

Primarily, these photographs depict the conditions in which children at Willowbrook State School live. But the children are not the whole story of the institution.

Much of what might have been photographed was out of bounds for our photographer. Those shots which were permissible were taken under the watchful eyes of a New York State Department of Mental Hygiene public relations director, the director of photography and the director of Willowbrook, Dr. Jack Hammond.

Rules prohibit the use of photographs in which patients' faces are clearly recognizable. Other, unwritten rules, encourage many employees to try and make a dismal situation look better than it is for the benefit of the camera.

During the day of shooting, Dr. Hammond was approached in the corridor by a delegation of female attendants who had a gripe. They wanted to know why their supervisor had been told to "get the kids dressed" for the pictures.

How come we have to get special

clothes on them now," an attendant said, "when we don't have the clothes any other times."

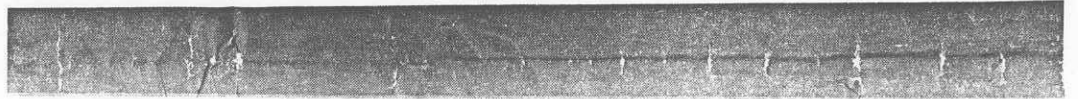
Although he said that no warning was issued to staff supervisors, Dr. Hammond acknowledged an "institution grapevine," which quickly spreads the word that an outside observer is approaching.

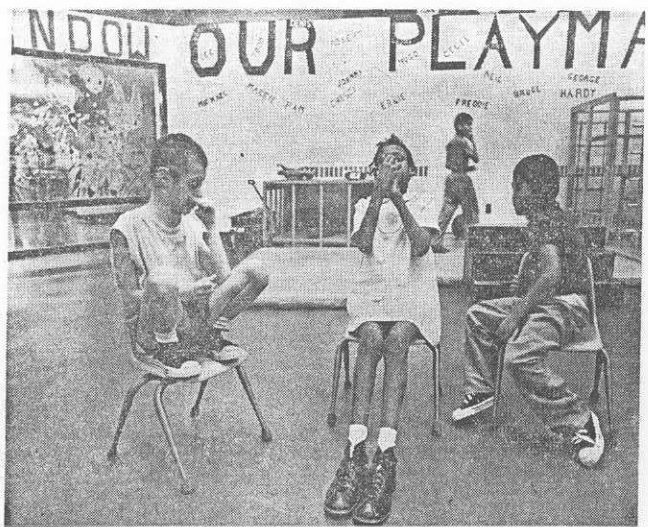
Compared to what kind of living conditions are prevalent at Willowbrook, these are photos of what one attendant referred to as "the nice places inside."

—JANE KURTIN



Existence is reduced to eating and sleeping for these girls. Could they be helped? Maybe. But the New York State budget doesn't provide for taking chances on a maybe.





When money was available, Willowbrook built children's wards which are bright, cheerful and well equipped. This facility is an exception within the institution.



Alone, on his bench, a child stares at strangers who briefly interrupted the routine of his life.



He can't protest. He can't write letters. He can't scream out for help. He can only sit alone, and wait.



Bright eyed and eager for attention, two retarded children take time out from occupational therapy for a quick kiss. They're not able to learn what a normal child can, but they can love just as much.



In this children's ward, beds are side to side. New York State health standards call for about 60 square feet of space for each of them.



Destined to lifetimes of inactivity in Willowbrook or similar institutions, these spastic children might have been helped with intensive physical therapy when they were younger. Now, beyond help, they spend days on wooden mobile cots.

This is Willowbrook...



In desolate ward rooms, profoundly retarded adolescent boys sit on waiting room style benches. There are no activities. There is no attempt made to teach them. (More photos on Page 18.)

S.I. Advance photos by Eric Aerts