

Parents go to court to reopen meetings

By GERALD S. NAGEL

Parents of four children at the Willowbrook State School obtained a show cause order yesterday seeking to annul a Dec. 3 memorandum from Dr. Jack Hammond, the school's director, that forbade staff members from meeting with parents on the school grounds, even on the staff's own time.

The order was obtained from Supreme Court Justice John A. Garbarino in St. George, and is returnable at 2 p.m. next Thursday.

Dr. Hammond and Dr. Alan Miller, commissioner of the state Mental Hygiene Department, were named as respondents.

In their petition, the parents held that as a result of such meetings "for the first time we became involved in the treatment of our children, and we began to learn how we could

contribute to their care."

The petition included an affidavit from each parent that described his inability to obtain involvement by the school administration or assistance in care and treatment of his child.

Each told of weekly visits and of having provided home visits. They called the memorandum "arbitrary and capricious conduct."

CITES RESTRICTIONS

A fifth affidavit was submitted by their lawyer, Robert L. Feldt, in charge of the Staten Island office of the Legal Aid Society, who took issue with the memorandum's basis, a restriction on overtime pay and compensatory time off.

Feldt said no claims for either have been submitted.

Feldt also said he attended some meetings of his clients, other parents of patients in Building 6, and their children's

medical practitioner, Dr. Michael Wilkins, and social worker, Mrs. Elizabeth Lee, and found the atmosphere to be professional and constructive.

He submitted a study that concluded parents of mentally retarded children were a recognizable source of help in their children's treatment. He noted that Dr. Wilkins' parents group "recently received praise from Dr. Frederic Grunberg, deputy commissioner of the Department of Mental Hygiene, as reported by the Staten Island Advance on Jan. 11, 1972."

Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee were dismissed Jan. 6 on a few hours' notice, despite evaluations of their excellence by superiors. It is believed that Dr. Hammond held them responsible for the release of reports of child neglect and mistreatment that were published first in the Advance beginning in a series the week of Nov. 15 and subsequently received the attention of several state officials.

Dr. Hammond has refused to comment on the dismissals and could not be reached for comment on yesterday's action.

The parents wrote that Dr. Wilkins and Mrs. Lee "organized us and other parents into a group and met with us regularly . . . These meetings helped us gain an understanding of the problems of our children, and we began to have a little hope that we could play a role in improving conditions in Building 6.

"We organized and conducted recreational activities for the children and planned to develop programs for the children, together with the staff."

The parents petitioned for "the right to resume meeting as a group at Willowbrook with medical and social work staff members treating our children,

and for such other relief as the court may seem just."

The text of Dr. Hammond's memorandum follows:

"It has come to my attention that some of the members of the Social Service Department are coming to work on Sundays. The hours of work for the Social Service Department are from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Mondays through Fridays. Accordingly, effective immediately, NO MEMBER OF THE SOCIAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT IS TO WORK ON SATURDAYS, SUNDAYS OR HOLIDAYS UNLESS SO AUTHORIZED BY ME. (Capitals are Dr. Hammond's).

"Further, you are directed not to meet with any parent groups on the grounds of Willowbrook State School, either during your working hours or in your off duty hours unless you have my authorization to do this.

"You will, of course, continue to meet with parents or residents on an individual counseling basis as required."

"If any social worker wishes to plan for some constructive activity that cannot be managed within these guidelines, a written request, giving adequate reasons, should be submitted to me.

"The above directive is in keeping with Office of Manpower and Training personnel administration memorandum No. 68-15, which essentially states that no psychiatric social work employes are entitled to earn overtime or allowed compensatory time off for work beyond their regular work week of 40 hours.

"This does not preclude working Saturday, Sunday or a holiday and having another day off in lieu thereof, provided previous authorization is received from the director, and also does not preclude working more than 40 hours per week if this is necessary with no credit for such overtime and no compensatory time off for such overtime."