

Willowbrook Staffers Are Upset Over Image

By FRANK McKEOWN

Whether the confrontations occurring at Willowbrook State School in Staten Island are political ploys, disagreement among doctors, or sincere efforts on the part of concerned parents for improvements at the understaffed school, the unsung heroes in the disputes are the employees who show up every day.

But the notoriety stirred up at the institution is upsetting their routines and interfering with their efforts to provide care for the brain damaged residents at the school, according to a union spokesman.

Irene Hillis, president of the Mental Hygiene Employees Association, in a letter to THE NEWS charged that the demonstrations at Willowbrook are causing

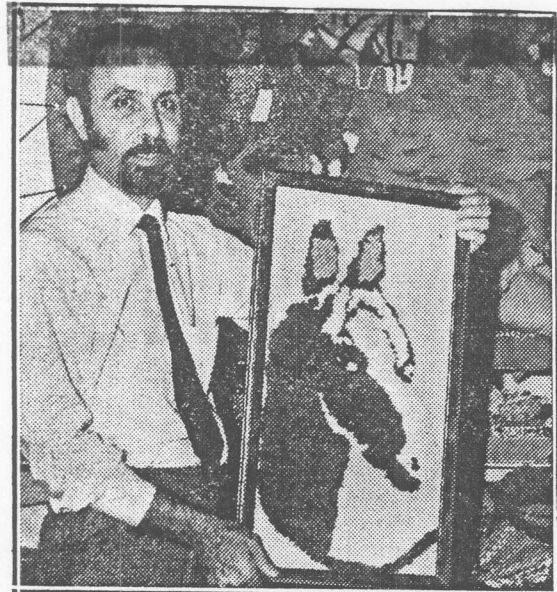
the public to look with almost sheer repulsion at the employes of Willowbrook."

She claimed that, "While it has not been said, the implications are there."

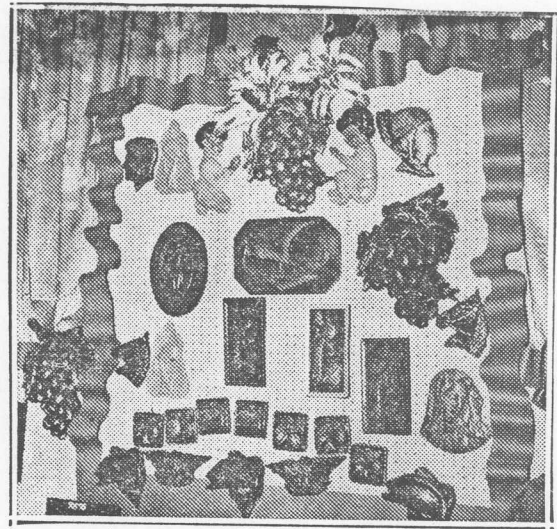
The union spokesman, who is also a rehabilitation therapist at the school, asserted that the public should be reminded that the employes are dedicated persons who give a good part of their lives to care for the retardates while receiving only a minimum salary.

They not only work at the school, she said, but also contribute much of their own time and money to provide items which would ordinarily be supplied by the parents.

Little noted in the recent furor at the state school are the almost unbelievable results that have been



John Mokbel, occupational therapist, exhibits handiwork turned out by his students.



Handpainted ceramics turned out by school residents.



Teachers of Building 7 are teaching teachers on their works.



Despite brain damage, residents can learn simple arts like weaving.

achieved, even though the school—as no one has tried to deny—is badly undermanned.

Through patience and tender care, the school staff has taken children who are both deaf and dumb and suffering from cerebral palsy and taught them to walk and to work.

2,000 Can't Walk

To try to care for the 5,200 retarded persons at the facility, 2,000 of whom are so disabled they are unable to walk, there are somewhat more than 2,000 employees.

These include full-time, attending and consulting physicians, registered and practical nurses, teachers, attendants, and rehabilitation, occupational and physical therapists.

Added to this are maintenance crews, cooks, cleaners, clerical staff and laundry workers.

Employment of this staff brings the annual cost for each resident to \$7,704, according to Dr. Jack Hammond, the director.

Hold Classes

Although the school is understaffed by more than 600 attendants, the employees manage to operate classes in which palsied children are taught to walk and the deaf to speak.

Spastic residents, whose motion belie their ability to turn out rugs on hand looms, needlepoint, and wall decorations.

John Mokbel, an occupational therapist in Building 7, said he and one other therapist handle 62 residents. Although this is admittedly too many for each instructor, Mokbel pointed out that they manage to interest the retardates in 32 different projects.

Had to Cut Back

John LeFevbre, director of Building 7, said that an experimental team program which had achieved "tremendous results" had to be curtailed because of the cutback in staff caused by the state's job freeze.

"The children respond to love," said Miss Hillis, "and the progress some of them have made because of the care of the employees at Willowbrook is little short of amazing."

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Mrs. Phyllis Gerard of Fresh Meadows, a professional teacher, helps an integration class at Willowbrook.



Mrs. Beatrice Thomas of Sunnyside pours milk for children in her class at Willowbrook during relaxation break.

LeFebvre pointed out that some normal persons might look at the work of the retardates in Building 7 and consider it an easy chore. "But you must remember that the average IQ of these residents is between 9 and 39," he added.

Low IQs

Of the residents at the school, 60% have an IQ of less than 30, 28% between 30 and 49, and only 12% have an IQ of more than 50. Through the concentrated ef-

forts of the staff at the school, many of those with IQs above 50 are able to leave the institution and become productive members of the community.