

Some Vols Look and Leave

The recent rash of adverse publicity on the "snake-pit" conditions at Willowbrook State School has stirred the conscience of many would-be volunteers, but not to the point where they can ignore the everyday facts of life at the institution.

Mrs. Elizabeth Hammond, wife of the school's director, Dr. Jack Hammond, and coordinator of volunteer services at Willowbrook, said that since television and the papers have been dramatizing conditions at the school, offers of volunteer aid have inundated her office to the point where she can't get her normal work done.

But many of the would-be volunteers come to the school, go through the process of interviews and screening and then fail to return, once they have taken a tour of the buildings.

Mrs. Hammond cited a group of 100 student nurses from New Jersey who came to Willowbrook with a petition seeking to act as volunteers. The petition read:

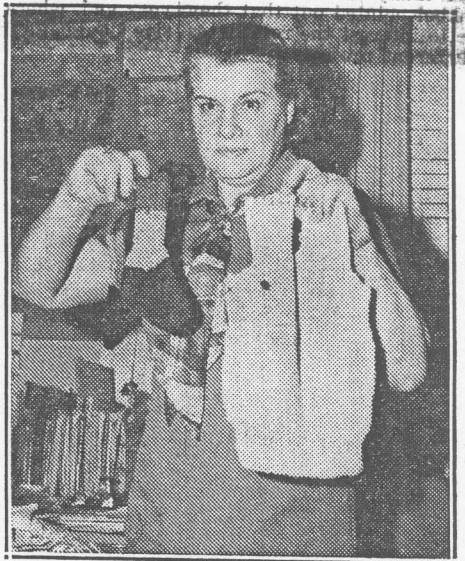
"We the undersigned, as members of the medical profession, feel that individuals are entitled to the fulfillment of certain needs which are basic to all human beings.

"These include adequate food, shelter, clothing, health facilities, and stimulation, both environmental and emotional."

The girls had brought gift items for the residents at Willowbrook, but that was as far as their volunteer service went. Once they found what normal conditions were, the student nurses never returned to Willowbrook, Mrs. Hammond said.

"We need and want all the volunteers we can get," Mrs. Hammond said, "but we need persons who are really motivated to help. People can't just walk in off the street and say they want to offer their assistance."

The wife of the director asked those who would like to help to write the school and determine in what



Mrs. Elizabeth Hammond shows items made by resident of Egger Lutheran Home.

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way they might best benefit the residents. She pointed out there are many ways in which persons can help, without having to come to the Staten Island school.

Mrs. Hammond said one of her greatest needs at present is for a man to act as scoutmaster for the Boy Scout troop. "The troop of 30 boys is about two years old," she said, "and I am the registered scoutmaster."

Mrs. Hammond added that five men assist with the troop, but that none felt qualified to act as scoutmaster. Also helping with the scouting program, she said, were Boy Scouts who do volunteer service with the retardates to earn their Eagle badge.

Ready for Second Class

"The Scouts work with our residents on a one-to-one basis," Mrs. Hammond said, "and a great relationship is established." She added that the Willowbrook boys had almost earned their second class ratings and were waiting to take an overnight hike to fully qualify.

Mrs. Hammond praised members of SERVE, retired persons who are the hard core of the volunteer staff. She also spoke glowingly of teenagers who come to the school to help.

"I have a healthy respect for our teenage volunteers," said Mrs. Hammond. "Young people are more accepting of the retarded, and treat their conditions with a more open mind. They also seem to be more loyal to the youngster in their charge and more faithful in caring for him."

"Youth of today want to become more involved in their society

and take a more active part in it," she contends. "They are going to be the citizens of tomorrow," Mrs. Hammond said, "the doctors, lawyers, legislators. They are going to have much greater knowledge of their institutions than have their parents today."

In some instances, she said, parents are bringing teenage children to Willowbrook, to accomplish something worthwhile and also as a possible way of keeping them off drugs.

Mrs. Hammond pointed out that St. Charles School in New Dorp is organizing a time-release program in which parents pick their children up at Willowbrook after the students put in volunteer service. The school transports the students to the state institution.

She had particular praise for Mrs. Edna Rasmussen of New Dorp, a volunteer at Willowbrook for 17 years, and Mrs. Alice Loraing of West Brighton. Mrs. Loraing, a member of SERVE, had proposed a "Rocking Chair Brigade" in which the older persons simply pick up spastic children at Willowbrook and rock them. The children respond to affection just like more normal youngsters.

The Knitters Help Out

Some rarely visit the place like the residents of the Egger Lutheran Home, who take old wool and knit booties, caps and sweaters for the residents at Willowbrook. "We send them old wool, or unwanted sweaters, and they unravel it and knit things for the school," Mrs. Hammond said.

She explained this was not only a boon for Willowbrook, but also provides therapy and exercise for arthritic persons at Egger Home.

Patients at a mental hospital, she said, have made a model of

a city for the blind youngsters at Willowbrook to feel. A model of a playground has been made by students at PS 32. They are also working on a model of a jungle.

Floral Pieces Useful

Boy and Girl Scout troops also have turned out home-made Montessori boards, by which the students at Willowbrook can learn to tie laces and bows, or button clothes.

Mrs. Hammond said she also had help from a cemetery attendant. "He figured out that birds from floral pieces, the ribbon and artificial flowers might be of some help," she said.

Instead of going to the garbage dump, they are brought to Willowbrook. The ribbon is used to teach weaving, the flowers are used to decorate, and the birds are used both as mobiles for youngsters doomed to bed and as instruments to teach sounds.

Mrs. Hammond voiced appreciation for the clothes volunteers have contributed, but added that most of them have been for women and girls. "Our real need is for men's and boy's clothes, since they are harder on them," she said.

She pointed out that she has a legal responsibility for the volunteers and that each has to be separately insured. Their backgrounds also had to be carefully screened, she added.

"Many of these people mean well but are unfamiliar with just what volunteer service requires at Willowbrook. Investigating the increase in volunteers is taking up all of my time," she declared.