

Our reporter describes horrors she saw

Jane Kurtin, who was called upon yesterday to testify at a hearing held by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, is the Advance reporter who began writing about conditions at Willowbrook State School nearly three months ago. Miss Kurtin described her testimony last night on WRVR-FM radio.

By JANE KURTIN

The second day of hearings by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, which is investigating conditions at Willowbrook State School, was marked yesterday by the absence of two panel members and any parents or relatives of patients.

Representatives of the SPCC

anticipated strong parent response to the hearings which, a spokesman said, "gives them a chance to tell what they think is wrong with the conditions their children live in." So far, testimony has been heard only from Dr. Jack Hammond, director of the institution, and this reporter.

Anthony Pinto, president of the Benevolent Society's Willow-

brook Chapter, made a brief appearance at yesterday's Manhattan hearing but said his full testimony would have to come at another date. Hearings will take place in Borough Hall, St. George, for the rest of the week.

Ira Raab, attorney for the SPCC, asked that I testify on the basis of observations which I made during frequent visits

at Willowbrook and reported in a series of articles in the Advance.

"While I cannot say that I at any time saw a resident of Willowbrook being actively mistreated," I told the attorney and the panel in the course of my testimony, "the effects of neglect are obvious."

Raab asked for specific descriptions of conditions that I felt were particularly harmful to young patients at Willowbrook.

"The attendants," I explained, "are desperately overworked and cannot possibly keep up with the mess created in wards, where many of the 65 to 70 patients are not even toilet-trained."

The panel, chaired by Councilman Frank Biondolillo and consisting today of Councilman Robert I. Postel, Anthony Gaeta, administrative assistant to Congressman John M. Murphy, and William Katz, director of the Richmond SPCC, heard my descriptions of the nauseating stench of the wards at Willowbrook, the distressing screams and the horrifying sights.

"Patients hurt themselves and each other," I explained, "partly because of the severe shortage of attendants who could make sure that the patients don't injure themselves."

Raab wanted to know if I had ever made any of my observations known to any member of the institution's administration.

"As far as I knew," it was explained, "the administration

has always been aware of the situations that exist at Willowbrook."

"Do you know," Raab asked, "if the conditions at Willowbrook as you saw them were reported to officials of the Department of Mental Hygiene?"

"Certainly," I said. "Dr. Hammond, director of Willowbrook, has filed reports and written letters to the department describing the deterioration of the institution."

"But," I continued, "a directive was issued from Albany asking Dr. Hammond and other administrators of state institutions not to belabor the Department of Mental Hygiene with requests for exceptions to the job freeze (which cost Willowbrook about 1,000 employes) or for money to pay for needed equipment."

Raab asked what else was contained in the directive. I replied:

"Dr. Hammond was informed that it was not necessary for him to keep telling the Department of Mental Hygiene how bad things were at Willowbrook because the program analysts who visited there weekly were continuously on top of the situation."

"But as the situation at Willowbrook was getting bad enough for the program analysts to automatically request a lifting of the job freeze as they promised, the state's fiscal crisis worsened."

"By the time things were so bad that Willowbrook was eligible for additional money and employes, the fiscal crisis was so bad that no relief could be given."

Raab asked that I appear at the hearing scheduled for tomorrow at 2 p.m. to testify again and bring with me copies of all articles pertaining to Willowbrook which have appeared in the Advance and documents citing cases where children have suffered because of neglect.