



Edmund Gomez, right discusses math with participants in educational program at the Staten Island Urban League, Tompkinsville. English and science are also taught to current and former residents of Willowbrook State School.

# Willowbrook 'grads' given help

By PETER HARRIGAN

"Four thousand, three hundred and twelve. Now how would you write that, Larry?" asks the teacher. The student writes, slowly, 4,312. "Good boy, Larry."

Although it may sound like a typical elementary school scene, it isn't. It's a special school being held on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons at the Staten Island branch of the New York Urban League's storefront facilities at 94-96-98 Victory Blvd., Tompkinsville.

Larry isn't an ordinary student, either. He is one of about 15 students, aged 16 to 22, in the program who are or were residents at Willowbrook State School.

According to David C. Smith, the Urban League's Island director, "These kids are learning because they want to learn." The ultimate goal of the program, which began in its present form early last month, is to bring the participants to an 8th or 12th grade equivalency level.

The idea of such a program began to develop last year when members of the International Union for Advancement, a group at Willowbrook, requested the use of the Urban League's facilities to conduct an educational program for former residents of the school.

"All we did at the time was let them have the key," Smith recalls. However, when in December Skill Advancement Inc., an affiliate of the Urban League, was funded to conduct educational programs in the five boroughs, Smith approached the president of the International Union for Advancement, Eager Smith, and expressed a desire to involve the Willowbrook students in such a program.

"Our program wasn't a reaction to the situation at Willowbrook," David Smith said referring to the recent controversy between parents, employes and administrators at the institution. "We were aware of it."

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Both he and Eager Smith spoke of the necessity of such a program as a supplement to the education offered at Willowbrook and as an alternative to the situation presently experienced by many persons released from the school.

While all persons released are placed with families, "this is done without feeling for the kids," Eager Smith, who is employed at Willowbrook, said. "They are given no jobs. How is a kid supposed to live," he asked. He also charged that many ex-patients return to the school grounds "because they don't know anyone else," only to be threatened with arrest for trespassing.

Both men hope that in time participants in the Urban League's program will be able to find employment and "be on their own" to a large degree. Most want office jobs, such as multi-line operators, messengers and mail room clerks.