

Willowbrook

# A city within A city

Willowbrook State School is like an enormous puzzle. One can, like the dailies, throw periodic pieces of it out to the public and hope for change. But any hope for lasting revision can only come with an informed public. With this intent, the Register begins the first of an extended series of articles dealing with this city of over 7,000 patients and staff members. Read it on page ten. (Clarke)

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Publisher: Joseph Sclafani

Editor: Fred Armentrout      Adv. Mgr.: J. Tumminello  
News: John Signoriello      Consumer Aff: Felix Clarke  
Features: Joe Killeen      Entertainment: MaryAnn Aguiar  
Regina Kelly      Sports: Gabe Perillo

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## A city within A city

Over 7,000 people cohabit Willowbrook State School at some time every hour of the day. When one claims conditions are horrible at Willowbrook, it is not one story .... it is well over 7,000 stories.

With an interest in those conditions dating back to our own four part series on working conditions in 1970, the Register is again beginning a series to probe the reasons why everyone seems to agree on conditions, but no solution seems forthcoming.

Register reporter Felix Clarke began delving into conditions almost two months ago. Twice we held up publication to gather more data. Research continues, and so will this extended series.

Editorially, we have refrained from final conclusions on Willowbrook conditions. We feel it is a time to gather the conclusions of those at Willowbrook, or connected with it in some way, rather than add a flurry of our own to the already cluttered list of accusations and counter-accusations.

To this end, we urge you to read the articles on page ten and think about them as a beginning, rather than a conclusion, to the Willowbrook story. Tentatively, there will be four such articles. This first presents much of the raw data that future articles will attempt to explain..... through interviews and evaluation.

It is our feeling that together, as a community, it is more important to understand conditions at Willowbrook than to judge them. Only with understanding can there be any hope of correcting what one New York writer has termed, "Our final shame."

**Willowbrook**

# A city within A city

By Faith Clarke

Willowbrook is 380 acres of buildings, streets, sewers, people and problems.

Willowbrook has a security force (police) of 11 men and women who are on duty 24 hours a day by shifts. In addition they must help fight fires and drive the ambulance in emergencies.

Not unlike any modern city Willowbrook has crime. Three burglaries reported this year. Television and typewriters taken from buildings. The trouble has been placed at the easy access from the outside and the inability of the small security force to be everywhere.

Vandalism has cost Willowbrook much of its \$102,694 allocated for repairs. Ernest Palsic, business officer, said that most of the repairs can be handled by staff and only in a few cases did they have to send for outside contractors.

Tom Delaney, CSEA President, feels that the same problems exist in the maintenance department as in any other. "How can you expect 5 electricians to do the work of 12?"

Clothes...at times bag-fulls have left the school. "Like a City, we have the same human characteristics," relates one supervisor. "How can you really tell what is missing in a place this size?"

907,805 pounds of clothing go through the laundry every 4 weeks. Mr. Cunningham, only 2 weeks on the job, must supervise 102 employees 5 days a week with a shortage of 6 persons. "Even though 6 sounds like a small number, they are sorely missed," states Cunningham, as we tour the laundry.

On Wednesday, February 9, 1972 six people were absent from the laundry. These people worked in the dirtiest job in the place—the soiled clothing room.

After all the clothes that had been sorted the previous day were washed, nothing else could be done...there was no one to send upstairs to sort clothes. As it was, people were doubling up on duties.

We asked one attendant why she chose the laundry to work in. "I like the weekends of," she said. Another worker stated that she couldn't take the wards.

A laundry worker starts at grade 4 which pays a little over \$5,400 a year. There are only 9 supervising grade 7's for the laundry and the turn over there is quite slow. One man who has been in the laundry for 15 years stated that it was 10 years before he was up-graded.

For 7 years a dress presser has been operating without a safety guard when the steam shoots out. The operator said that it didn't bother her, though she has been doing it for three years and usually burns her arm when she rubs up against another part of the machine.

She is the only one pressing dresses and averages 800 dress a day before quitting time.

The safety officer was there that same day noting all the things which had been reported un-safe. Cummings felt optimistic about the repairs saying, "you know we do the best we can." In fact they have promised me my six other people...maybe in another three months. Turn-over is expected there, as it is in the wards. The work is hard and for women it is difficult being on their feet. Mostly, it is a dead-end job.

Transportation costs Willowbrook \$18,764 (mostly tolls)...automobile costs are rated at \$30,384. There are 25 cars, seven buses (2 not working), tractors for snow removal, jeeps, dump trucks to haul snow. Edward Sonnergren has been garage supervisor for 1 year, after 19 years in maintenance. With Sonnergren are 24 other men. Three of them are mechanics, the rest are vehicle operators.

Overtime is necessary to drive the laundry truck and deliver the food. Rotation is used to equal things out. There is not too much problem with breakdown and parts are not a problem. The Director has a Rambler for his personal use in addition to the three staff cars assigned to the Administration Building.

\$1,472,941 is spent for food at Willowbrook. The food allocation also includes the 220 persons (staff) living on the grounds. Palsic explains the food set-up as follows: Staff personnel are charged by the month for food. The State sets \$20 a month as the normal amount a family of two will spend. They do not have to spend exactly \$20. They are, however, not allowed to exceed what the business office considers necessary.

Five kitchens feed resident and staff. There are 196 kitchen personnel with a State freeze on 25 additional slots. The kitchen operates with 1 Food Administrator, 2 Supervising Dieticians, 1 Assistant Dietician, 2 Food Service Managers, 4 Head Cooks, 20 Cooks, 32 Assistant Cooks, 26 Kitchen Helpers. The civil service grades run from 4 to 20.

Before the cuts, 4 cooks would go to the Hudson River Training School every two weeks for an eight week training course.

The Head Dietician complained that 1/5 of his scheduled staff is out every day. Even though the kitchen is well organized and seemingly in harmony, the absenteeism causes the under-manned staff to work that much harder.

Willowbrook has over 1,000 spastic residents. For them a diet of strained food is mandatory. A case of 6 cans of green-beans, powdered, costs \$12. According to the chief dietician, it still is cheaper because the labor involved in making the solid food eatable for a spastic would be twice as much.

**STAFF PATTERNS**

As of January 24, 1972 Willowbrook can only employ 3,505 people - to date 2,838.8 of these positions are filled. The State has permanently removed 24.5 and put a freeze on 588.9 positions.

The department with the highest amount of positions allotted is the Psychiatric Attendant, Grade 6, with 1800 - 1520.9 filled.

The Safety Department is allotted only 11 positions and has them all filled.

To best understand the enormity of the employee makeup at Willowbrook following is a list of the departments' maximum allocations and present staffing:

Position	Max.	Filed	Position	Max.	Filed
<b>Maintenance and Support Services</b>					
Administration	14	12	Safety	11	11
Clerical	84	73.5	Housekeeping	55	47
Maintenance & Engineering	92	76	Vehicle Maintenance & Oper.	32	24
Kitchen	221	196	Stores	44	30
Laundry	118	102	Groundsman	15	12
RN-Staff Nurse	40	5	RN-Beginner	45	45
RN-Head Nurse	200	33.6	Nurse		
RN-Suprv.Nurse	34	28	RN-Instructor	13	9.3
LPN	65	58.9	Hosp.Attendant	5	2.5
Psych. Attendant	1800	1520.9	Sr. Attendant	104	82.8
*Others - G4		11	Staff Attendant	89	74.6
Psych. Nurses	21	12.5	Porter-Cleaner	34	28
Physicians			Resident Psych.	1	1
Medical Spec.	5	4	Clinical Spec.	10	9.8
Pathologist	1	1	Dental Serv.	12	10
<b>Psychiatric Services</b>					
Suprv. Psych.	2	0	Professional Psych.	4	4
Trainee Psych.	4	1	Teachers Serv.		
Social Services	17	10.5	Teachers	122	102.6
Occupational Therapy	93	36.5	Physical Ther.	38	16
Recreational Therapy	53	38.3	Speech & Hearing	13	5
			Chaplains	5	5

**BENEFITS OF STATE WORK**

Benefits provided for 220 employees on the Willowbrook grounds. There are eight houses constructed for administrative personnel and their families and three large apartment complexes.

Rental charges are formulated under section 135 of the Civil Service-Law. The rental computation is figured out by the location and condition of the premises. Willowbrook's residences come under the Urban/Suburban designation.

According to the law, monthly room rates for Willowbrook should be: Excellent \$40 - Good \$29 - Poor \$21. The State charges 100% for the 1st room; 75% for the 2nd room; 50% for 3 to 10 rooms; 50% for 3 to 7 rooms if conditions are good or poor; (no charge for rooms above 7 and 10).

A family of two living on the grounds may pay, on the average, \$20 a month for food. All personnel living on the grounds can order their food from the State.

The State has a ceiling on the amount of food a family may order within a month and deducts the cost from their salaries - as is also done with their rents.

Ernest Palscic, Business Administrator, explains the ordering procedure. "Each family or individual orders their food and the food order for the institution is placed as one order."

There is no separate order placed for residents and staff. Palscic is quick to caution that a very accurate system of inventory and control keeps the food orders within regulations.

Roast Beef is ordered at a yearly rate of over 8,000 lbs. and is calculated on the monthly usage.

The Chief Dietician stated that they must maintain an inventory of one month in advance, however, the cook with us on the tour said that after the weekend they would not be much left in the storeroom.

Seven women from building 32 (a borderline area) are employed as housekeepers by administrative staff. The reported salary is \$5 a month. To date the case of one of these ladies Mary Bruno is before the courts.

Mary Bruno wants to leave Willowbrook and her father says no. He is willing to go to court to keep her there.

### THE BUSINESS OF WILLOWBROOK

The Department of Mental Hygiene is the largest economic supporter of the State Prison system. All clothes that bear the institutional label are made by prisoners. Willowbrook uses the prison made detergent that sells at 12½ cents a pound. The State recently changed from the cheaper soap at 5½ cents a pound - all made by prisoners.

A large sum of the \$18,764 spent by Willowbrook for transportation goes for tolls. The clothing allowance for the school is \$371,789, most of which goes back to the state. Medicaid payments to the schools by the state, totals at \$522,049 and to the city an additional \$236,000 is paid for water. This is the first year that Willowbrook has had to pay for water. However, the money is not allocated in the budget.

Willowbrook pays \$79,824 for communications. This bill is the combined phone usage for the school, Institute for Basic Research in Mental Retardation at Willowbrook and Gouverneur, the Manhattan hospital for 200 non-ambulatory patients - known as the Willowbrook Center.

### COMPANY STORE

A system of stores, operated by the state, provide a variety of products for state institutions. It is here that residents, staff and visitors may purchase the personal and gift items at prices regulated by the local institution - it has a virtual monopoly on patient business.

Willowbrook's Community Store employs 7 people. The store manager, Mrs. Dorothy Menza, is paid \$8,942 annually. Profits from the store are intended for the benefit of the resident and staff.

Spending of the profits is controlled by the Department of the Budget. Permission is usually granted to spend money for parties, Christmas gifts for residents without relatives and to supply home-made ice cream for a tasty-freeze truck which was donated to the school and is operated, free of charge, for the residents.

### CREDIT UNION:

A notice posted in the laundry reminds the employee to apply for payroll deduction - "just a small \$5 will start a savings account." Palscic speaks highly of the state operated payroll deduction system. An interest of 6% is paid to depositors and, for those with deposits up to \$2,000, a free life insurance policy is given depending on age and savings.

To further aid the employee a credit union was established eight years ago under the direction of Palscic, president for the past eight years.

The credit union is regulated by the federal government and for the most part has been rather successful.

To date the membership is 1,502 with \$329,204.30 in loans since 1964. The assets have risen to \$519,626.86.

The credit union pays out approximately \$550 a month for insurance and an additional \$420 a month for the computer system in Baltimore which is used to handle union affairs.

There are three committees which regulate the credit union in addition to the five member executive board.

### VOLUNTEERS:

Mrs. Elizabeth Hammond, wife of the director, heads the office of Volunteer Service. Mrs. Hammond, before coming to Willowbrook, started and co-ordinated volunteer programs in two other institutions.

Mrs. Hammond, a salaried Psychiatric Nurse and Boy Scout Master, initiated the volunteer program at Willowbrook. In 1971, a total of 37,382 hours have been recorded by individual volunteers (about 7 hours and 40 minutes per patient)... with groups compiling an impressive total of 18,999¼ hours.

Volunteers are used in every area of service for the institution.

Most of the volunteers serve in the baby buildings helping attendants with the changing of diapers and playing with the children. College students often work in the psychology department.

as others help in Occupational Therapy and in the school.

It is not uncommon to find volunteers answering office phones, repairing toys; decorating wards and sewing clothes which sorely need repairing.

Money donated is used for playground equipment, hospital equipment and for gifts at Christmas time.

### THE MEDICAL MODEL

Willowbrook, as are all New York State Schools, is run by doctors - psychologists, psychiatrists, analysts, physicians and consultants.

A building doctor makes the final decision concerning the status of a resident.

Teachers and lay-personnel are not allowed to question the authority of the doctor. Often, a resident who is transferred from a locked building to an advanced building goes through a period of adjustment.

The doctor can prescribe medication if it is reported that the resident is "acting out" or seems unmanageable.

The social worker is confined to making evaluations for family-care and community living. Yet, the nine social workers have only been able to place 96 residents in family-care. Based on their reports, many more residents can qualify for the various outside programs but will never be reached by them or the psychiatrists.

Dr. Sternlicht heads the habilitation department. It is here that programs for advancing the educable and trainable are molded. Essential to this department are the 5 psychiatrists who are responsible for applying the IQ tests. The Occupational Therapy instructors do the initial evaluations and make their reports to the doctors.

Here again there is a strain between the instructors and doctors. The doctors seldom consult personally with the instructors at the training site. The outcome is that very few residents receive a complete evaluation.

One instructor tells of how it took 2 years to get a pair of glasses for a student in his OT class. The boy has the habit of picking up everything he sees and eating it. The doctor would not okay the glasses for this reason.

The instructor felt that the glasses would enable the child to use his spare time constructively, as he showed a positive response to training and he could perhaps learn to differentiate between edible and non-edible materials. Finally after the instructor personally assumed responsibility for the glasses, they were issued.

The administration has not moved on the request for eye glasses with magnetic lenses for the many residents who are legally blind.

Attendants are quick to respond to suggestions of applying some additional therapy in the ward for students who show positive response in OT classes.

"We are too busy," cries the attendant in staff meetings. "We have to mop floors and bathe too many to spend time with them in therapy."

These reports go constantly to the administration. The doctors are quick to remind that they are in authority.

Psychiatric attendants total 1,993. This number is the combination of grades 6 to 8.

The head supervisors over attendants are nurses. Whenever an attendant has a problem which must go past the building they have to report to one of the nurse supervisors.

The medical concept is the rule at Willowbrook. Attendants, for the most part, are not medically trained. When critical decisions must be made, the attendant must step back giving way to the doctor and nurse.

Miss Barbara Wright testified before the SPCC panel concerning the death of a patient in building 14. Miss Wright felt that the nurse should answer questions concerning the child's death.

When a grievance hearing was finally held, the nurse, Mrs. Barton, was represented by the supervisor of female attendants, Mrs. Marie Salvatore, Miss Wright's ultimate supervisor. Miss Wright was never allowed to enter her charges because they were over-looked and turned around to read that she was actually concerned with her change of shift.

Mrs. Salvatore ruled in favor of her change of shift, as her supervisor, and ruled in favor of Mrs. Barton's action because of her position as a nurse.

Attendants are often called on to perform the task of the LPN, i.e., giving medication, changing bandages, giving shots. However, the attendant is at no time recognized by the administration as an authority on the care of the resident.

The lines of authority are clearly drawn between medical administrator, medical personnel and custodial personnel - but lines of job function and responsibility are arbitrarily altered by medical and administrative personnel.

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