

# Outside Willowbrook: 'Appalled...sickened'

By ARTHUR SMITH

All the adjectives seem to fail when people talk about Willowbrook State School.

"Disgraceful," they say, "appalling," "horrible," "sickening." The words are inadequate for the sense of outrage many people feel at conditions inside Willowbrook.

But with all their indignation, most Islanders also felt they were helpless as individuals to do anything for the hundreds of children crouching naked and unattended in the wards.

"I think it's appalling," said an elderly West Brighton woman interviewed in a survey of reactions to months of the Advance's and television reports about Willowbrook.

"I only wish I were younger so I could do something to help," she said.

Many people saw the situation in terms of money and manpower, both in very short supply at the institution, and were puzzled at the set of priorities in state spending.

One woman called the billion-dollar Albany mall project a "very sick joke" while children suffer at Willowbrook.

A Dongan Hills man was more direct: "The politicians ought to take the money out of their own pockets and give it to children who can't help themselves."

Nearly everyone agreed that more trained personnel were needed on the wards to care for the severely retarded children.

"When you saw these children naked, you got the feeling that it was a concentration camp affair where they were being misused and mistreated," said a young school teacher, "But there are simply not enough people to handle them."

"Somehow there just doesn't seem to be enough energy, love and time to care for the needs of these children," she added. "And that has nothing to do with money."

A New Springville housewife said she was upset by stories about Willowbrook and had been leaving clothes and toys her children had outgrown for the residents there.

"My friends and I would like to do something personally but at least this is some kind of contribution," she said.

Perhaps the most revealing feature of a survey of Staten Island's reaction to the Willowbrook question was the number of people who said they had no opinion.

For every person who told their feelings about the place, there were two more who gave no response.

"Well, I've never been to the place so I couldn't really say" was a surprisingly common answer.