

NEWS reporter Mary Engels examines unused room of new Kings County State School. While state Health Department waits for funds with which to open school, the 744 children it could house are crammed into such as Willowbrook.

Retarded Overcrowded As Rooms Stay Unused

By MARY ENGELS

There's nothing as lonely or wasteful as an empty room. Nor as frustrating when one realizes that that room and several like it can be put to good use by housing mentally retarded human beings such as those at Willowbrook State School on Staten Island.

The plight of Willowbrook has focused attention on those in need with emphasis on overcrowded conditions and absence of care. Yet the fact remains there are places and facilities where care could be administered but for lack of funds.

This past week was spent by officials touring the boroughs and seeing what was available or about to be for those who are developmentally handicapped.

The Queens State School, at 114th St. and 37th Ave., Corona, Queens, is an imposing seven-story, gray brick building that was once a motel.

Currently it houses 52 retarded residents who partially occupy one floor, the seventh. But it can accommodate 272.

Most of Building Unused

Aside from some offices on the main and second floors and the use of the third floor by the Association for the Advancement of Blind Children, a voluntary agency for profoundly retarded sighted and blind youngsters, the building remains empty.

"We don't have the money for sufficient staff but that's only part of the problem," said Dr. Bernard Tesse, director of the school.

His motto: "If you want to have a good institution you must have excellent community services."

The doctor's goal is to be able to provide those services.

"Ours is a community located institution and 75%

of our efforts go into community work," said the doctor with the serious demeanor.

More Professionals Needed

"The two things we need for greater expansion of our community program is to increase the number of professionals to work with schools, voluntary agencies, hospitals and parents to seek out retardation at an early age and, if possible, prevent institutionalizing those who do not need it and to increase our number of satellite clinics. (Currently there are three—South Jamaica, Far Rockaway and Woodside.)

"To do the job effectively with both a fully operated residential and community program would cost at least a half million dollars a year," said the doctor.

"Since the freeze of money and jobs at Albany we must wait," Tesse sighed, readily admitting to being often discouraged but never undaunted.

Ever hopeful, too, is Dr. Calvin Michael, director of the Williamsburg Residential Training School at 160 South 2d St., Williamsburg, and the soon-to-be opened Kings County State School in Fresh Creek, Brooklyn.

Getting Funds

Interviewed in his office at the Williamsburg School, Dr. Michael was in a happy frame of mind having been told that \$87,000 was being released by the state to him to buy much needed equipment for the center.

"It's a movement," he said and considering the four-story brick building is virtually empty save for kitchen equipment installed almost two years ago and the furniture in the doctor's office, it was also an understatement.

The center can house 80 residents as well as train many to become productive members of society.

"We hope to provide a number of services such as

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educational, recreational, occupational, as well as residential," said Dr. Michael pointing to the fact that money isn't the only factor necessary for a working operation but "proper staffing as well."

He, too, cited the need for getting the community involved.

"We service both Williamsburg and Greenpoint areas consisting of several hundred thousand people. We've been busy spreading the word while waiting for money for equipment and staff," Michael said.

This project, as well as the one being constructed at Kings County, is financed by the State Health and Mental Hygiene Facilities Improvement Corp.

The Kings County facility will house and train approximately 744 mentally retarded children and adults in a village-like complex of 15 two story residential buildings. The buildings, grouped in five clusters, surround a one-story central services building that the workmen now call "the core."

The core is divided into quadrants: administration and infirmary; swimming pool, gymnasium, library, physical and occupational therapy; education; and services and recreation.

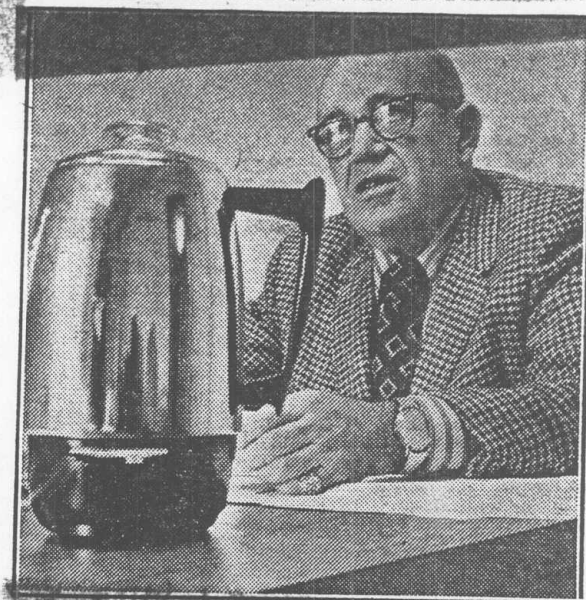
Residents will sleep in two and four bedrooms grouped around a small enclosed court. Each "family" of eight will share a living room, and three families (24 residents) will share a dining and multi-purpose activity room.

"Our pride and joy is the outdoor development which will include small and group play areas adjacent to each residential cluster," said Michael. The facility will open, hopefully, some time this summer.

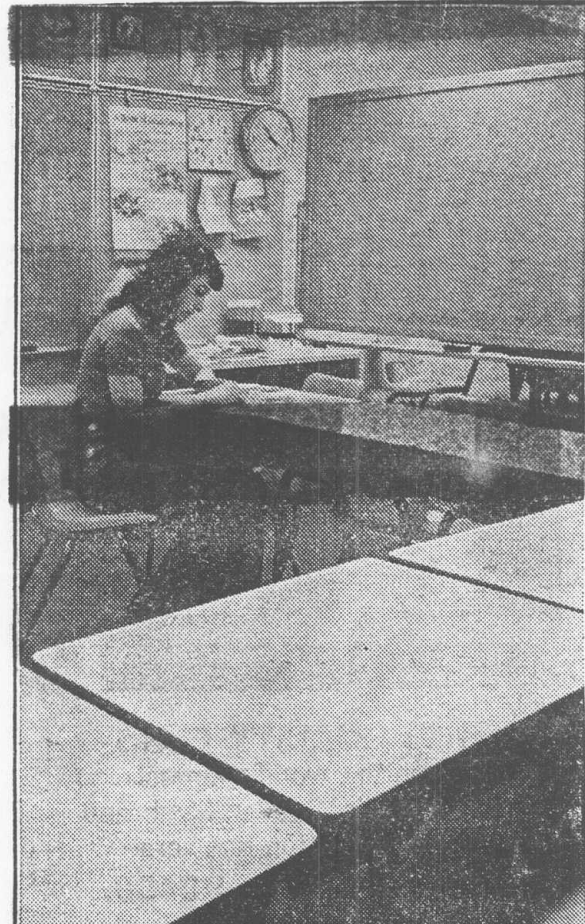
For the benefit of those who seek those alternatives to institutional care there is also a non-profit, non-sectarian agency, called Retarded Infants Services at 386 Park Ave. South, N.Y. 10016.

It has developed a number of programs specifically designed to stem retardation and prevent institutionalization. These programs include home aide assistance, visiting parents, foster care and individual and group counselling. When necessary a qualified development psychologist provides evaluative testing and the services of a psychiatrist are available for parents or relatives.

Anyone wishing to receive the services may apply by telephoning the Social Services Department of RIS at 889-5464.



Dr. Bernard Tasse, director of Queens State School, works in his conference room.



Teacher Judith Peck prepares lessons for a class at Queens State School, Corona.

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