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Willowbrook

City within a City Part II

Three weeks ago the first extensive look into the city of 7,000 plus that is Willowbrook State School was run. This week "education" as practiced at the school is reviewed. Read it on page two. (Clarke)

Education in the City

Willowbrook is called a "school" by the State. Some feel it is a school in the way State insols are "rehabilitation" centers. Find out why on page two.

The Curriculum Guide

What are Willowbrook children trained for in school? Find out on page ten.

The School System

A review of the mechanics behind the "system" of education at Willowbrook. Read it on page ten.

Willowbrook Education in the City

by Felix Clarke

Editor's Note: Following is the start of part two of the Register's extended analysis of conditions at Willowbrook State School. This article and the supplements on page ten take a close look at what "School" there is at the institution.

ICE CREAM AND CAKE...
When the new buildings were constructed to handle the incoming babies at Willowbrook there were no room for classes. With over 6,000 residents at Willowbrook in 1964, newer wings were not added to the school building until Dr. Hammond became Director.

We can better understand the background of educational programs for the mentally retarded by noting that not until 1910, when the Binet-Simon method of intelligence testing was introduced, did the State take steps to create the State Schools and then not until 1911, Letchworth Village was built. Wassaic was not built until 1930. Willowbrook opened as a school in 1947, West Seneca in 1962 and finally Suffolk in 1965 with a total population (at all centers) in 1965, of over 25,000.

There are still no educators on the administrative staff of the department of mental hygiene and Willowbrook's top administration is without an educator in a policy position.

It was vividly pointed out on New York Illustrated (aired on February 29, 1972), that all the buildings at Willowbrook where residents are housed, excluding the new pre-fabs, are not designed with classrooms. The areas used in the basements of the buildings are converted isolation room, store-rooms and staff locker areas.

In the words of one teacher who worked with the babies before the construction of the modern intensive therapy complex was built, "for ten years we taught these children in isolation rooms, and any room that was available."

There is no "Education Department" within the department of mental hygiene. All educational guidelines and laws are handed down from the State Department of Education. One law which affects the retarded "students" of Willowbrook, is the requirement that any person reaching their 21st birthday, is dropped from the school.

Dr. Sternlight, chief of habilitation services, explains that Willowbrook must abide by this

law even though the student does not meet the mental age of 21. The State maintains that students over 21 should be directed towards vocational studies. The evening adult program at Willowbrook has an enrollment of 180 from a population of over 2,000 adult aged students.

On the charge that parents dump their children at places such as Willowbrook...and the counter-charge that there was no other place capable of dealing with their child...stands a mandate from the State Department of Education that "school districts maintain special classes with ten or more educable retardates and to maintain special classes for the trainable where eight or more reside within the district."

Right behind that mandate

the state says that "only 45% of the estimated number of children for whom special education is indicated are enrolled in public school programs."

A mother with a 15 year old son in Willowbrook sums it up with "I put him here because I wanted him to learn and they said that this is a school. Now he is out of school because he sang in class and reportedly disrupted the children. Where am I to turn? There is no other place for him to learn."

When discussing with Mrs. Glasser, Education Director at Willowbrook, the need for spending \$20,000 of federal money on bus trips rather than include such expenses in the state educational program, she claimed, "That is the ice cream and cake...they (the State) give you the bread and butter."

BREAD AND BUTTER... In our first article we introduced the opinion of an educator, Ernest Maddock, that educational programs in State institutions are token efforts...and mental hygiene departments are not responsible to educational departments.

The New York Department of Mental Hygiene somewhat substantiates this allegation and adds support to those critics who claim that Willowbrook is not a school in this "Comprehensive Plan" (Vol. 1, 1965).

"A program of educational research should be developed in the State Education Department to evaluate present offerings, initiate and test experimental program innovations and test the application of research in

the educational programs under various auspices for the mentally retarded in New York State." In other words, efforts in education are experimental and not part of the school's normal function.

Today, at Willowbrook, only two educational programs exist with specific goals. They are Title I for enrichment and the evening adult program for vocational training.

Mrs. Glasser's contention that every child who comes under the educable category is in school, has been vocally contested by parents, professionals and lay personnel.

"Space" says Mrs. Glasser, "that is a big problem. You have to service these youngsters. So in the basement of the buildings we have classrooms. They are nice classrooms, but our premise is to get the children out of the building."

With additional staff and space would you be able to add another 1,000 to the school population?

Mrs. Glasser: Well, let me say right now with the space I have I could not lift it any more. I could lift it maybe by 50. But I couldn't go over. Because if you teach a child, you must have a classroom and an adequate classroom."

So, is it correct to say that there are possibly another 200 to 300 children who could be educated?

Mrs. Glasser: If I had the staff.

Are they not being educated because of lack of staff and space?

Mrs. Glasser: Well, lack of space or lack of staff...If I had another school building I might be able to service more."

There were only 987 students in academic study during the month of February at Willowbrook. As of that time "student" enrollment at Willowbrook was 5,268.

Ernest Maddock, in his report stated: "It is alarming to realize that a program of such magnitude and expense has failed to inspire significant research effort, that there is such a paucity of reliable evidence available regarding the extent, degree, and effectiveness of administrative policies governing the implementation of educational programs in state operated school hospitals for the mentally retarded."

Such is the case at Willowbrook as evidenced in the hospital improvement and inten-

sive therapy programs. H.I.P. is an experiment to prove that all children are "reachable" and not an educational program. It is a federally funded "experiment" to prove the basic assumption of all schools—all children can learn.

Intensive therapy starts from scratch in teaching children basic self-help skills... "It is too early at this stage to tell if a child is educable or trainable," says Miss Hallorhan, educational supervisor.

Yet, in this program, 16 teachers and 16 teacher assistants are used...and the supervisor of the infant care unit says, "we work very hard with the children here, but after they leave here we don't know what happens."

Infant therapy can best be explained by drawing a parallel between this program and the pre-kindergarten program for the public schools. Pre-kindergarten is used to familiarize the student with what is expected of him when he starts school formally; what he will be learning and why... finally, it gives the teacher and parent an opportunity to evaluate the child's potential.

Infant therapy according to Miss Hallorhan prepares the retarded child, "enabling us to determine whether the student goes into the educable or trainable class."

We asked Mrs. Mason, supervising teacher for the Infant Therapy complex, what has to be done to prepare a child for school and what age group they draw from. "By law we are to start at age five, but we will put any child in the program who can benefit from it."

"We have 170 students in the program now (120 of them are non-verbal) - at this point she asks, "why if the state has a separate department for speech do we not have a full time speech teacher?" When she was asked if she ever had a speech teacher her reply was, "yes, one man who was only here on a part-time basis."

Now that admissions have stopped at Willowbrook it is easier for the observer to follow the progression of the young child who comes to the school as a baby and stays until the adult years are reached.

Infant therapy is the first step of the learning experience. Here they are taught to sit in a classroom, to stand at command, to walk up and down stairs. Mrs. Mason... "here in the institution a child may grow up and have never gone up or down a flight of stairs. We orientate them by actually using a model of a stairway."

"With the food in the institution a child may never get to see a banana with the skin on, so we bring in raw fruit, to let them

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see touch and taste. We teach them physical identification—these are your hands, your head, etc. You wear gloves on your hands and a hat on your head." Mrs. Mason explains that this strengthens the child's ability to associate articles with themselves.

Mrs. Mason concludes that the infant therapy program provides the child with their initial experiences. Her examples are: "We teach them the self-help skills such as brushing teeth, toilet training, dressing and un-dressing. The basic words 'please' and 'thank you' and how to clean up behind themselves." "As you can see, we do a thorough job of teaching the children what is expected of them and how they should behave—a socialization—interacting so to speak."

Willowbrook has given the following chronological breakdown for ages 0-12: Under age 5, 193; age 5-11, 1, 179. Dr. Sternlicht, the author of the Hospital Improvement Program (H.I.P.) explains in the section entitled "Overview of the Project" why certain children were picked:

"These toddlers were essentially unable to care for their daily needs, personal, such as feeding, dressing and toileting and they were so overactive, disturbed and destructive as to be unable to participate in any kinds of meaningful, socially acceptable group interactions."

A social worker exclaims, "Just ask the occupational therapists in infant therapy why they get so angry when a child is taken to HIP—I'll give you the answer, they are the ones who have trained the children to do all the things HIP is to do."

This reporter observed 50 children from building 78 as they were taking a walking tour around a helicopter that had landed in front of their building. The majority of the 50 observed had the physical characteristics of retardates with Down's Syndrome (Mongolism).

In making an enormous oversimplification the national figures show that from 10 to 20 percent of moderately and severely retarded children are mongoloid. Willowbrook has statistically noted that 77% of the population was profoundly or severely retarded. Citing this as the reason why there was more custodial care being given and not education.

The HIP program has surely done a magnificent job in rehabilitating the 50 (if the children observed were "severe") profoundly retarded children used in the experiment...in Dr. Sternlicht's words, "it is an enormous effort to rehabilitate this type of individual, IQ's 20 to 49, to change his personality, and to correct all the harmful traits which may have developed."

All of the children observed were alert and able to move about without difficulty. They responded to the commands of the teacher and showed discipline as they lined up in a group.

...the scene suggested the "miracle" of the HIP program was more due to use of more "educable" than "trainable" children for its model program.

According to Dr. Sternlicht, "these residents will always constitute a very costly element in state institutions, costly because of the destruction they cause to inventory, because of the medication they forever require, and most important of all, because of the loss of human dignity and distortion of personality."

Children from Infant Therapy feed into the HIP program. If HIP takes the problem child and habituates them to the degree observed then here lies the answer to educating profound and severely retarded children.

Infant therapy is the key area...here is where the greatest concentration of staff is located, 16 teachers, 16 teacher assistants using 16 classrooms, 8 physical therapy rooms, 10 occupational therapy rooms, 2 speech therapy rooms and 2 large recreation rooms.

What are the problems? How regularly does each student attend class? It has been reported that hepatitis is at the 0.3 percent level per child. Does health keep children away from class? There is a reported shortage of attendants. A former teacher assistant states that on more than one occasion she went to the ward to fetch a child who had not come to class. The attendant would say, "I have no clothes to dress him in." How many miss class because of no clothes, or because they are hungry and in a fit of rage?

At Willowbrook children will fight with another child at little or no provocation. We have been told this over and over again by the director, nurses, teachers and so on. How many children will not make it to class because of an injury in a fight?

These questions have not been answered to date. They are important if children are to be given the opportunity to learn. Infant therapy is that vehicle and placing them in another unit (HIP) to do what has already been done, if true, seems to defeat the very purpose that the program was designed for.

In the words of Ernest Maddock, "Instructional methods are diverse and areas of training are broad so singularly assigning the education and training of residents to an educational department in an institution for retardates, as desirable as it may be, is not permitted."

In Willowbrook responsibility for education comes under the education department, occupational, recreational, and physical therapy units. Each department is understaffed and over-worked. Their needs are dealt with separately in the budget...not as one education department.

...educator, "on what funds will be spent for education and training are usually far removed from the scene and often represent vested interests."

STATUS QUO..... a long time the professional teaching staff at Willowbrook was 85% black. They were fully certified within the state guidelines and flocked to Willowbrook because the City would not certify them—claiming that the southern schools do not meet the standards set by the City.

Just over a year ago most of the black teachers working in Building 3—the main education building—were unilaterally transferred to work in the basement classrooms of the buildings. When the teachers organized and went to Mrs. Glasser asking for justification she was reported as saying:

"It was necessary that the more experienced teachers be placed in the buildings to support the efforts of the supervisors." It was not clear to the teachers then...and, as they state it, is not clear to them now what this statement meant.

To replace the experienced teachers, Mrs. Glasser is using student teachers from Wagner College. It is reported that these same student teachers are hired after training.

A teacher claimed: "This is why Willowbrook is turning out students like the ones now going to the urban league for remedial work. These people do not come here with real concern for the children, they are here to get credits and they mess up the children in doing so."

Dr. Leeseberg of the Wagner College Education Department said, "we have been sending student teachers to Willowbrook for years." When asked if there was a written agreement between the two schools he stated:

"there was none."

Dr. Leeseberg stated that they send around 4 students a year depending on how many there are in the program. The program, he explains, deals with those interested in mental retardation, and other institutions are used. When asked how many remain, and if there is an agreement to keep students when trained, he said there are about 4 as far as he remembers and that there is no such agreement.

During the interview with Mrs. Glasser the question concerning black teachers being transferred to the basements of the buildings came up...

I have been told that all the black teachers that you have on staff work in the buildings and none work in building 3.

Mrs. Glasser: This is not true. Does the question of discrimination ever come up in the education department?

...Mrs. Glasser has never heard of it. I was never aware of it.

It was reported that after the black teachers went to Mrs. Glasser with their grievance, with their chief concern discrimination, she confronted a black supervisor stating: "Why did you not report that these teachers were organizing, it is a part of your duties."

Miss Hallohran, a grade 18 supervisor with 14 years at Willowbrook, does the hiring for the Education Department. A teacher claims there is a deliberate attempt to keep away from the department people with long hair and beards. Blacks with afros and anyone who Miss Hallohran feels is "radical."

"Two weeks ago," continues the teacher, "a white fellow with all the proper certification, plus his Masters, applied for a job. He was told that they were not hiring, and we know that they are." To date, Willowbrook has six vacancies, according to Mrs. Glasser.

The problem with the man applying for the job, according to the teacher, was that he had long hair and a beard. When asked why this reporter observed people with long hair and Blacks with afros, he replied, "they have all grown their hair after they were hired."

Every summer, Willowbrook runs a program to motivate the students who are entering school in September. A supervisor reports that before any qualified personnel are hired, Dr. Hammond's children and the children of the administrative staff must get a position.

"Then, we can hire other people. But first, remember, only after their children get in. And, you know, they are not always qualified."

PARENTS AND TEACHERS...When parents have been asked how their children are doing in school at Willowbrook, they respond with "I don't know, every time I ask I get a 'Don't worry' from the school." Mrs. Glasser was asked about a PTA. She would like to have one... but so many of the parents live great distances away. Parents agree that this is a problem and they can not offer any immediate solution.

What does bother parents is the response and attitude shown to them by the Education Department:

CASE 1: "When I asked to visit the classroom of my son—I was told "that it was not a policy of the school. Several times I asked for the name of his teacher... I finally received a name and wrote to her. The letter said that he was well-mannered—easy to get along with. Never about his school work, what he was being taught."

CASE 2: A mother reports that she happened to visit her son on a Monday and found that he was not in school in Building 3. She asked why and received this reply: "Your son was singing in the classroom and disturbing the other children." She does not understand why he was transferred to the building school and no one consulted her.

some 12 years ago. They see me every Sunday, why didn't they tell me? I would not have known about this change... It just happens that I am here today."

CASE 3: A mother and father who have been active in the parent's organization feel that their son has not progressed much since he has been in the school. "We do not know the answer, and there isn't anyone give the answers." When asked why they do not contact the education office they replied, "We've tried but they do not give us any help."

Mrs. Glasser and Dr. Sternlicht were asked about school policy towards parents. Mrs. Glasser says that she is more than willing to meet and talk with parents. She claims, however, only three or four parents have ever approached her concerning the education of their children. "I am more than happy when some parent does ask, but very few do."

Dr. Sternlicht was asked why parents could not see the teachers. "I do not understand how anyone could be told that it was not policy. The school is always open to questions and visits from parents."

A departed employee, familiar with procedures, feels that it is the administrative process that deters many parents from following up their inquiries about their children.

The process is very long she explains: "When a request for information comes in it goes to the supervisor and then to the department head and then to the Director...back down the line again until maybe two months go by."

It was pointed out in a public meeting that the Rabbi from Willowbrook that "no letter can leave the school without the director's cover signature. It is state law," he added.

THE DISRUPTIVE CHILD.. It has been repeatedly revealed in interviews with past and present residents of Willowbrook that sedative drugs are widely used at the school. Dr. Sternlicht claims "They need drugs so that they may adjust well."

Mrs. Hallohran, Assistant to Mrs. Glasser, tells how about 16 boys from building 5 were beating up other students, playing hooky, and just being a nuisance. She continues, "We had to do something so we created a program in their building (MAP) and we allow them to return when they have adjusted."

She says that drugs are used a "rightly so"... "They are hyper-active and some have emotional problems... the drugs calm them down enabling us to work with them, not against them."

Following is a synopsis of interviews held with four of the students from building 5 still at Willowbrook:

CASE 1:...Boy states that he was given thiorazine 3 times a day because he did not get along with the attendant on his ward. The doctor okays the medication without seeing the boy.

because a resident stole candy from the community store. He claims that he did not do it. Again doctor okays medication without seeing the boy.

CASE 3:...Boy states that he was in Willowbrook and was allowed to go home for an adjustment period. While at home he stabbed another boy in a fight and was returned to Willowbrook. He was immediately placed on medication 3 times a day... again without seeing a doctor.

CASE 4:...Boy states that he was placed on medication because he cursed and fought with the attendants. The attendants went to the doctor and had the boy placed on medication...the doctor never interviewed the boy.

CASE 5:...Elizabeth Lee tells of a girl who was so heavily sedated that she could not stay awake to do her work.

The boys were asked if all 36 students on the MAP ward were on medication. "We believe they are," Dr. Sternlicht says all but seven are. The boys believe that they are "trouble-makers"...so they have been told, and state that their troubles did not just come because of their attitude or behavior in school...they are compounded from all of their problems in the institution.

What are their problems and how do they affect their learning to read and write? An ex-teacher sheds light on this problem: "Drugs were not used on retarded youngsters. They were used mostly on those that would be disruptive for the institution. You must maintain order in an institution of that size."

In other words, these disruptive students are not retarded to begin with. However, this same teacher admits that the sedation drugs affected his students so badly that "I had youngsters that had to be carried around, some we had to lean up against the wall." Mrs. Hammond claims they are "culturally retarded...victims of their environment...sent to Willowbrook by the courts." A representative of Family Court claimed the procedures for placement is "privileged" information - but apparently Willowbrook is viewed as a preferred environment.

A two year study of the Family Court's Committee on Mental Health Services shows that the selective policies of the private and voluntary agencies that handle children from broken homes with delinquent problems "result in a disproportionate number of Black and Puerto Rican children being placed in training schools." There are male and female delinquents who are not retarded and are placed in wards with people who are." They react, claims one attendant and then the administration punishes them for speaking out.

THE IQ TEST:...Dr. Hammond under oath before the panel conducting hearings for Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (S.P.C.C.) stated:

statement. The social service workers interviewed say they "cannot see how testing of 5,000 students can be done with only 4 psychologists." Dr. Sternlicht claimed, "We do not routinely test residents. Every new admission is evaluated."

Mrs. Glasser, on evaluations stated, "A psychological review is usually done when a child enters the institution, and they might not be done again...depending upon how many psychologists they have on staff at the time."

When we get the youngsters in school, if we feel he is not performing according to his IQ figure, we will recommend a new test for him. Now this (IQ) as far as school placement, is just a guide for us. There is not much difference between a 48, 49, 50 or 51 in my opinion.

It depends upon which way the psychologists sees it or what rapport the child has with the psychologist. To us, it is just a guide. That child would be screened for school by one of the supervisors, and would be placed in a class according to his ability...socially, academically, emotionally."

To what point does Willowbrook use IQ as a guide and where does reality step in? The statistics indicate that a resident with an IQ below 50 will not be placed in an educable class. This means that unless the student is self-motivated and can show that maybe his IQ is higher than tested, there will be no emphasis placed on academic studies. Just recently the education department took notice of the borderline trainables who showed they could absorb academic studies. Now about 30 students are in an experimental Program to see what they can achieve.

A social worker sums up the leverage the IQ has with the school: "I have personally found at least 6 cases where the IQ was tested with 3 or 4 year intervals...In the meantime these children are sitting in wards where they do not belong. Some of them show a little sign of brightness and are made a big fuss over; the other children sit alone in the corners until the pet-children are transferred. When the neglected children are then made a fuss over they respond, and someone decides to give them an IQ test."

An occupational Therapist tells of the problem he had getting a boy who's IQ he feels is above the recorded 34. "We make reports out every 3 months and give them to the psychologist who never comes here to see the student we are talking about. This one boy who has not been tested in 6 years and I can not get any response from the psychologist or any answer on when he will test this boy."

"To give you another example on how our efforts are frustrated and how the children cannot achieve their potential, it took me two years to get one boy tested who surely needed them. He had a habit of picking

for not issuing the glasses. Finally after I gave my word and signed that I would be responsible, he got them."

"To sum it up," he said, "how can they expect these children to learn when in this building alone we have many kids who are legally blind and the administration says that glasses cost too much money."

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Jesse