

# Willowbrook story goes upstate

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SPECIAL TO THE ADVANCE

SYRACUSE, N.Y. — The Willowbrook State School controversy made its way to central New York last night, when the Center for Human Development of Syracuse, sponsored a film and panel discussion entitled: "Willowbrook — The Last Great Disgrace."

The setting was Syracuse University. A mixed audience of more than 250 persons composed of university students in the special education, sociology, architecture, nursing and psychology programs sat among the business-suited professionals as well as parents.

The ABC-TV documentary narrated by Geraldo Rivera was viewed in silence except for an occasional shocked reaction from a member of the audience.

## AUDIENCE SHOCKED

All those who came to the presentation were involved in some way or another with the problem of mental retardation, and all knew that what was shown on the screen was real and probably happening at that very moment in institutions around the country. The audience was shocked to see naked and undernourished children huddling in corners and children being fed in less than three minutes because of an inadequate number of staff personnel at the institution.

Following the film there were questions and comments. The panel, which was chaired by Mrs. Harriet Blank, assistant head of the Human Development Center, featured Dr. Burton Blatt, director of the center; Mrs. Elizabeth Lee and Dr. Michael Wilkins, former employes at Willowbrook, and a Staten Island parent of a mentally retarded child.

After listening to each other and exchanging ideas, it soon became evident that the meeting was microcosm of the revolutionary thinking concerning mental retardation.

The interdisciplinary mingling of the many concerned fields of study and interests of students, professional people and parents, proved that they learned from each other.

At the meeting there was "a program of awareness," as Dr. Blatt said, with Willowbrook now a national concern and the people of Staten Island and those in Syracuse were one. Both places, though miles apart, were united in the hope that there would not be another Willowbrook.