

# Calls 'Willowbrooks' Concentration Camps

By BILL BARBER

State institutions for mentally handicapped children are virtual "concentration camps" where children go unheeded and are treated as "second class citizens," a staff member of the Willowbrook State School charged last night.

Dr. William Bronston, a child development training specialist at the school, told some 250 persons at an Americans For Democratic Action meeting in Garden City that "every day a Willowbrook exists, it is a crime against humanity."

"The time for bargaining and pleading — while people are being trashed — is over," he said, urging people to "jam our politicians against the wall so hard, they'll be afraid not to listen to us."

Bronston outlined two lawsuits filed against Willowbrook by the American Civil Liberties Union and the Legal Aid Society.

BOTH SUITS could potentially become class actions to provide help for parents whose children receive shoddy treatment in an institution.

"There's no doubt about it. We've got the goods on them" (Willowbrook), he remarked. "All you have to do is look at the films of this, or just walk through the buildings."

Mrs. Helen Kaplan, executive director of the Nassau Association for the Help of Retarded Children (AHRC), described her years of struggle to establish decent, workable facilities for the mentally handicapped.

She blasted state facilities for not providing the "home-like atmosphere" she feels the children need to grow and develop their abilities.

"This country has a sickness—a thing—for big buildings. You've got to have a big building. But none of these can provide the child with the treatment and care he really needs," she said.

Residents of Nassau and elsewhere, the woman said, have hindered progress for the children by fighting against facilities. "They say, don't build it next to my place...."

PRaising RECENT achievements in parts of Nassau in this area, the woman issued a touching plea for people to pressure legislators for action that would correct the neglect handicapped children suffer throughout the country.

People cried as she recalled a visit to an institution in Sweden, where another visitor asked a doctor why the hospital had bothered to build some special equipment for a retarded child.

"I have never remembered such anger as the doctor told her it was 'because she is a child.'"

ADA members announced at the meeting they have launched a petition drive and have collected 15,000 names protesting facilities throughout the state. The group hopes to gather 100,000 names before it sends petitions to Albany.

Part of the petition advises that "we want dignity for the handicapped . . ."