

Volunteers stream in to provide 'pickup'

By KENNETH R. FANIZZI

Jan Saret is a petite dark-haired girl with a big heart.

She's one of many volunteers who have been streaming into Willowbrook State School to help during the emergency.

She's fully aware of the plight of the retarded . . . her younger brother is one.

The 20-year-old girl drove from her home in White Plains to lend a hand in replacing striking employees.

She and a friend, Stanley Sury, of Purchase, another small upstate community, arrived at the huge institution at 2 a.m. yesterday, after their 35-mile trip. To get by the pickets, they said they were parents coming to pick up their child.

The problem hits home with Jan, a long-haired pretty girl with hazel eyes.

"I heard about the strike on the radio," she said, as she fed a child in a crib in Building 14, where she was sent after preparing breakfast for retardates in another building.

Jan and Stan slept in the lobby of one of the buildings and were awakened at 6 a.m.

"None of these kids can feed themselves," she commented. "They smile, and I know what they're saying," she said.

Jan spoke of conditions in the ward, noting that the diapers on the children look like they hadn't been changed "in months."

"The sheets are dirty," she added. Stan said he can't change diapers, but he busied himself by "picking up" and cleaning the wards.

"I haven't even had the time to call my mother and tell her where I am," Jan said.

Jan got out of the hospital a week ago after undergoing a gall bladder operation. She works as a salesgirl.

"I'm opposed to places like this," she said quietly, "it insults me how people could put their kids in places like this."

Her 17-year-old brother lives at home with the family and attends school. He can't walk, but crawls to get around, she said. "He has the mentality of a 10-year-old."

"The parents complain about people on strike and they're the ones that are copping out by sending their kids here."

As she spoke, the cries of distress of children emanated from the ward.

Jan and Stan were among the teachers, housewives, entire families, cooks and nurses who reported to an emergency volunteer desk set up in the main building, manned by the Willowbrook Chapter, Benevolent Society, Association for Retarded Children.

Outside, two nuns and five young people alighted from a station wagon with New Jersey license plates. They too had come to help.

Many of the volunteers were young people, dressed in dungarees, sporting long hair.

Stan works as a houseman in a country club upstate. "I can see the telephone company workers going out on strike," he said, "but we're talking about a lot of little kids in this situation and that's a different story."

"It's a sad thing to work here," he said, admitting he was nervous at first. "I didn't know what to expect."

The volunteers busied themselves sweeping the floors, assisting the nurses that braved the picket lines, and making beds.

Pity showing on her face, Jan spoke quietly of the deformed children she saw and others

"I can't imagine how anybody can leave a child crying on the floor and do nothing."

As she spoke, a nervous mother hurried into the building to pick up her child. As she and her husband drove away in the car, the mother caressed the child and combed back her hair with her fingers.

Across the street, a man walked, tenderly holding his mongoloid son in a blanket.

And back at the main building another carload of volunteers arrived—ready to pitch in.

A man walked in and said he had a sister at Willowbrook he's never seen.

"Do you mind working with little boys?" he was asked.

"Not at all," he replied. "I have four of my own."

The Lester Gochberg family — himself, his wife and daughter — drove in from Far Rockaway. He was assigned to the kitchen and the women went to work with toddlers.

Mrs. Gochberg, turning to her daughter, said she doesn't know the pangs and heartaches of families with retarded children.

"This is my way of saying thank you to God," she said, "by spending Easter weekend at Willowbrook."