

# One volunteer's own story



Kitchen volunteers prepare a meal for patients in one of Willowbrook's large dining halls. S.I. Advance Photos by Tony Carannadio

The volunteers were slowly trickling into Willowbrook State School. They were coming from places like White Plains and Bay Ridge, as well as Staten Island. Many of them had relatives in the stricken institution. Others were there because they felt they were needed.

A group of young volunteers in a Chevrolet stopped near the picket lines for directions. A

woman carrying a placard called them scabs. "Why don't you bring one of those kids home," she hollered, "then you'd really see what it's like." The volunteers said nothing and began to drive on. As they left, the woman sneered "Have a nice Easter."

Beyond the picket lines, deep in the heart of the sprawling

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estate, a group of volunteers were trying to maintain a semblance of feeding and sanitary care. The two wards in this building house about one hundred patients, all physically and mentally retarded. Few, if any, are toilet trained.

Most of the volunteers had been working since morning, spending their Easter Sunday cleaning and feeding the patients. One lone Willowbrook supervisor, a middle-aged woman, scurried from ward to ward giving instructions and encouragement.

A few seasonal decorations hung on the ugly walls. One of the patients had a chocolate Easter egg. He had smeared the chocolate on himself and his clothes, and gurgled incomprehensibly while a Bronx college student tried to clean him.

"This strike is unpardonable," voiced one of the volunteers, a nurse in her mid-twenties. "It's worse than murder." She said she was from California and wanted to return. The more I see of New