

Ex-Willowbrook patient:

'I don't know how I survived 18 years'

By DAN DOLGIN

The commission on health and education of the American Poor People's Youth Congress listened to 2½ hours of testimony yesterday from a former patient at Willowbrook State School, mothers of two patients and a representative

from Assemblyman Andrew Stein, in a second day of hearings on problems at the institution.

The four days of tape recorded hearings at 135 W. 14th St. will conclude tomorrow, with the official report and recommendations of the congress.

Bernard Carabello, 22, an 18-year resident of Willowbrook said, with anger, "It's horrible; it's a disgrace. I don't know how I survived 18 years at Willowbrook. Sometimes, I sit at home and wonder how I did it."

Carabello is a victim of cerebral palsy. He was

mistakenly placed in Willowbrook as a retarded child when he was an infant.

Carabello claimed he was thrown through a well, beaten, isolated, tied in a straight jacket, drugged with thorozone, threatened and intimidated by attendants, doctors and administrators during his stay at the facility.

The former patient said that Willowbrook administrator Milton Jacobs called him into his office one day, after a man identified as Dr. Wilkins applied to take him out.

"He said, 'You've been going out with Dr. Wilkins, haven't you?' I said yes," Carabello recalled, explaining that staff workers are allowed to take patients off the premises for recreation.

"Then he asked me where Dr. Wilkins took me, and I said, 'I refuse to answer any of your questions.' He asked where Dr. Wilkins lives and again I said I refuse to answer.

"Then he told me he'd lock me up in isolation if I refused to answer. So I told him false answers. I asked if this questioning would affect Dr. Wilkins' job and he said, 'No, not if you cooperate.'"

Mrs. Diana McCourt, the mother of a 10-year-old retarded resident of Willowbrook claimed that her child has "definitely regressed" since she was admitted to the school over a year ago.

Mrs. McCourt said she found her daughter, Nina,

"patches of hair pulled out, black and blue areas and stitches in her head" but has not been able to get an accurate account of how she was injured. "When she was 5 years old we sent her to a private home, with the help of funds from friends and relatives, but that home closed, so we sent her to another," Mrs. McCourt related.

NO MORE CARE

As personal funds began running short, members of the second home Nina was in told the family they were "going to upgrade themselves" and could no longer care for a child as profoundly retarded as Nina.

Mrs. McCourt said she then went to the State Mental Hygiene Department, where she was told there was a three-year waiting list for space in a state facility.

But, Mrs. McCourt claimed, state officials told her that if she would sign a document allowing the state to perform experiments in search of a hepatitis vaccine, a bed could be found for Nina immediately.

"I brought the document to my own pediatrician and personal doctor. They said the man doing the work was very respected and I shouldn't worry, so I went to see the school. The ward where the experiments were done was the cleanest and most attractive," she said.

"You have to understand the desperation of parents looking

for a place for a retarded child with a family at home. Now it's possible some great discovery could come of this but I feel all of us parents of children in the research ward got into it under coercion.

The mother of a 16-year-old boy at Willowbrook also said her son was often badly beaten or damaged while at the school but the school officials "never told us. They just said everything is fine and you worry about it."

Mrs. Conev Hanev's son has been at Willowbrook since he was 4 years old. She said he "still bares scars, over his entire back, of deep lacerations, which they told me came from a fight with other children. But I can't believe it."

The hearings continue today. Dr. William Bronston, a medical officer at the school, is expected to testify.

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