



One stair is a giant step to Donna Focazio, 8, but therapist William Murray lends a hand at Brookville AHRC. Children must learn to trust their own bodies.



At the same school, teacher Linda Friedberg gives bike rider Danny Youngs a hug. There is no such thing as too much love and attention for these retarded children.

of supervising the hostel, the house parents are given time off on weekends and a substitute couple takes over. Since the Hempstead hostel is rather large, AHRC reduces the housekeeping chores by providing limited maid and linen services. The residents also pitch in by making their own beds, keeping their rooms clean and doing the gardening. A recreation director works closely with the house parents to arrange evening and weekend entertainment at bowling alleys, movies, the Nassau Coliseum, Jones Beach and other spots.

For their services, the current house parents — Mr. and Mrs. Larry Daniels — receive \$7,500 annually, plus room and board and Larry's salary at the sheltered workshop. Until this month, they had served as a relief couple at a salary of \$45 per weekend.

Neither of the Danielses has had any professional social work training, although they did receive some orientation about mental retardation and the kinds of problems they might encounter as house parents. In this respect, they were in the same boat as their predecessors, Mrs. Josephine Williams and Leonard Williams, who died suddenly in June.

"When my husband proposed this to me, I didn't know what to think," recalls Mrs. Williams. "I hadn't even met a mentally retarded person before, and I was a little frightened at the thought of living with seven of them.

"Gradually, though, I overcame my fear. Actually, there were no grounds for it in the first place . . . I had just been reacting out of ignorance. I went from being very fearful to being very secure and happy. Taking care of my boys gave me a greater sense of confidence in my own capabilities. And I also acquired a great sense of affection toward the boys, which they returned to me in dozens of different little ways."

While there are differences in everyday operation, the general hostel concept calls for the purchase and furnishing of a facility by the state, which then turns it over to some responsible agency for the retarded. Annual maintenance costs are shared 50-50 by the state and the agency.

New York State has the dubious distinction of leading the nation in institutionalized retarded population. In 12 facilities, the state is holding almost 27,000 men, women and children in various stages of vegetative limbo. Not all are as bad as Staten Island's much publicized Willowbrook (the world's largest, with 5,000 residents) or Rockland County's Letchworth Village, but none has adequate staffing or habilitative programming. A frequently expressed goal of the state Department of Mental Hygiene is to decentralize this population "as soon as possible."

"It takes time," says Dr. Frederic Grunberg,