

local ward heeler and the ward heeler goes screaming to Albany, and that's it... the retarded are squeezed out. If the politicians didn't bend to this sort of pressure, the troublemakers wouldn't get away with it."

Of the six million Americans who have some degree of mental deficiency, 95% are already living in the community—although most are doing so without adequate supportive services. In Brookville, L.I., Nassau County's AHRC has a "cradle-to-grave" program which gives some idea of the range of services that's required. The program includes: pre-school training to prepare youngsters (aged 3 to 5) for possible admission to special public school classes for the retarded; a 34-room educational center for children who are considered too handicapped for the public schools; an occupational day center for severely retarded adults; and a new \$3 million sheltered workshop in Freeport, L.I.

But there aren't nearly enough private or public agencies providing this kind of supportive help. Parents, siblings, and other relatives are virtually left to their own resources if they want to keep a retardate at home.

"For one thing," says Joseph Weingold, "early identification and pre-school training could mean an awful lot of difference to the future of a retarded child. But did you know that in New York, the blind, the deaf and the *gifted* can get into public pre-kindergarten classes, and not the retarded?"

Among the best of the private agencies for younger retardates is the Kennedy Child Study Center at 151 E. 67th St., which diagnoses, trains, provides physical therapy and teaches children from birth through 8 years of age.

"My child would not be what he is today were it not for the Kennedy Center," says Mrs. Mary Cover of Manhattan, whose son Robert is a Down's syndrome child. "He'd be sitting at home or in a place like Willowbrook, staring at the walls, because the public schools wouldn't take him and there was nothing else.

"It's very difficult for the parent of a retarded child," continues Mrs. Cover. "We're too close to the child. We need someone who is equipped to say, 'look, this is what your boy can do,' and then get him to do it. We parents tend to take the negative side too much. After we've accepted the affliction, we start thinking the child won't ever be able to do anything at all for himself. And that's just not true."

Reversing such negative thinking is the goal of Retarded Infant Services, a nonprofit, voluntary agency with offices at 386 Park Ave. South. Among other things, R.I.S. provides counseling for both parents; sends specially trained aides into the home to relieve the mother; recruits foster homes for the retarded; and conducts a speakers bureau to educate the public.

"Many times," says Gerard O'Regan, assistant

director of R.I.S., "the parents of retarded children are ill-advised by friends, relatives and professional people. They are told to relegate that child to an institution without ever getting to know him, without ever getting any feeling about his potential.

"It is a terrible experience for a woman to give birth to a retarded child, and no one here is about to judge a woman if she should decide to give up her baby. But maybe if the mother and the child had some supportive help, the burden might not seem so great. As the child learned toilet training, self-feeding, walking—if these things are within his potential—the family might see him in a different perspective and the urgency to put him away would not be so great."

Educable graduates of the Kennedy Child Study Center go to classes for the retarded in public, parochial or other private schools. The Archdiocese of New York maintains 14 such classes for 165 boys and girls up to age 14. Some of these youngsters have been turned away from public schools because they are not able to maintain themselves in terms of "health and safety." But most attend parochial classes simply because their parents prefer a religious education for them.

The state's responsibility for education of the trainable and educable retarded ends at the age of 21. This can be the most devastating crisis of all. For years, the retarded individual has been conditioned to getting up in the morning and going to school or a vocational training program. Now, he is cut off from this activity and the associations it brings with his peers.

"There are sheltered workshops throughout the city," says Gerard O'Regan. "But these have extremely long waiting lists and it may take years to get into one of them. Once he's in, of course, he's got it made. He's involved in a long-term program that will keep him active and stimulated and feeling useful.

"But just like the rest of us, the retarded are enjoying longer and longer life spans. Eventually, this person's family is going to be incapable of caring for him. When this happens, what does he do, where does he go?"

"There is nothing in this world more heart-breaking than to see such an individual forced into an institution," continues O'Regan, who spent three years as director of social services at Willowbrook before he joined the staff of R.I.S. "This person is moved from his own private bedroom into a dormitory with 60 other retardates. There is no proper bureau space, inadequate closet space, no place to put such personal belongings as a record collection which may have taken years to gather.

"It would be hard for any human being to make this radical a change in his living circumstances. The retardate very often goes into a state of depression that he never recovers from.