

State policy criticized on Willowbrook

By RAYMOND A. WITTEK

New York State "gets precious little return" on a "mistaken" policy which results in the pouring of millions of dollars each year into large institutions such as Willowbrook State School, an expert on the mentally retarded said yesterday.

Dr. Burton Blatt, director of special education and rehabilitation at Syracuse University's School of Education, said he favors smaller, community-based schools for the mentally retarded which, authorities generally agree, can provide "better" care and treatment along with improved rehabilitation and training programs at less cost per patient than the larger institutions.

Dr. Blatt testified at the second day of a hearing in Supreme Court into allegations that 22-year-old Adrienne Renelli of the Bronx was mistreated while a patient at Willowbrook for the past 12 years. Among the claims is that she had been beaten and assaulted on a number of occasions.

In addition to suffering injuries, the woman's parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Renelli, maintain that their daughter has regressed since entering the school through the failure of the institution to provide her with adequate training and habilitation programs.

Congressman Mario Biaggi of the Bronx, the petitioner's at-

torney, said Mr. and Mrs. Renelli are seeking a permanent court order which would guarantee that their daughter receives proper care and protection, as well as habilitation, treatment and educational programs.

Justice Vito J. Titone, before whom the hearing is taking place, already has placed such a temporary order in effect.

Another witness, Dr. Jack M. Gootzeit, executive director of the Institutes of Applied Human Dynamics, which operates private day care facilities for the mentally handicapped in the Bronx and Westchester County, said he recently carried out an evaluation test on Adrienne Renelli.

He said he concluded that while she was a "borderline trainable" case, she "certainly can be" placed in a training program. He said he has more severely retarded persons in training programs in his centers.

It has been indicated in testimony that the school regarded Adrienne as being violent and did little to aid her, other than provide custodial care.

Adrienne, who also is an epileptic, has an intelligent quotient of 28. Seventy-five or lower is regarded as subnormal, Dr. Gootzeit said.

FUNCTIONAL TESTS

Dr. Gootzeit said he did not believe it fair to attempt to evaluate mentally handicapped persons on the basis of IQ. Instead, he said, he preferred to use what he called "functional evaluation tests" which determine how a subject reacts under certain conditions. It was this type of test which he used on Adrienne.

While Dr. Gootzeit was on the witness stand, Titone prohibited Assistant State Attorney General Judith Gordon from trying to develop the possibility of having Adrienne benefit from the advantages which she might obtain from a small group facility in the Bronx, operated by Dr. Gootzeit.

Titone ruled that the questions had no part in the proceeding and sharply reminded Mrs. Gordon of the state's obligation to care for the mentally retarded. She agreed. Mrs. Gordon represents the State Mental Hygiene Department, against which the court action is directed.

Dr. Gootzeit said in response to Mrs. Gordon's questions that he would give a preference to Adrienne and accept her as a patient in one of his Bronx day care centers, which are partially supported by state funds. Dr. Gootzeit's consent was predicated on the assumption that Mr. and Mrs. Renelli would keep Adrienne at home, and the state would provide transportation for her to and from the center.

Dr. Gootzeit disclosed he had recently declined an offer to serve as a consultant for a proposed new training program at Willowbrook because he felt that it would be carried out by untrained personnel. He described the proposal as a "capsulated" program that would take place in a "non-stimulating atmosphere."

HAS CAPABILITIES

Dr. Gootzeit's evaluation of Adrienne showed she had the ability to function in a group and was capable of being toilet trained and using utensils with which to eat (he said there was some indication that efforts already had been made to toilet train her and to teach her to use a spoon).

It is Mr. and Mrs. Renelli's position that the school, in addition to failing to safeguard her safety, has failed to provide her with programs which would provide her with at least some self-help skills and grow as a human being. Instead, they claim, she has regressed at Willowbrook because of inattention.

Both Dr. Gootzeit and Dr. Blatt joined another expert on the mentally retarded who testified earlier in criticizing Willowbrook's training programs, especially as they applied to Adrienne. They indicated that the school was content to provide her only with custodial care.