



Adrienne Renelli, a resident for the past 12 years at Willowbrook State School, gets assistance from her family's attorney, Bronx Congressman Mario Biaggi, right, in the County Courthouse, St. George. She is flanked by her parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Renelli. S.I. Advance Photo by Robert Parsons

## Too many to handle, says Willowbrook aide

By RAYMOND A. WITTEK

An attendant at Willowbrook State School, a high school graduate who had the benefit of a three-week orientation to prepare for her job, testified yesterday she took it upon herself to decide when and for how long she would try to train 22-year-old Adrienne Renelli, to eat with utensils or to dress herself.

The attendant, Mrs. Eunice Lee Howell of East Orange, N.J., said she had "too many people to handle" in her ward to give Adrienne more attention. At the time, Adrienne was among 63 mentally

retarded patients then in Ward A of Building 22. The patients were cared for by two to five attendants.

Mrs. Howell said she gave up trying to teach Adrienne after about a week. Experts have said that Adrienne, despite an IQ of 28, is capable of learning rudimentary self-care steps.

Mrs. Howell testified at the third day of a Supreme Court hearing into allegations that Adrienne, who also is an epileptic, had been mistreated

during the 12 years she has been at Willowbrook and that the state failed to provide her with training programs that would have helped in her development.

Adrienne's parents, Mr. and Mrs. John Renelli of the Bronx, are seeking a court order that would compel the state Mental Hygiene Department, which has jurisdiction over Willowbrook, to take steps to insure Adrienne's safety and health and provide her with training

programs to help her grow as a human being.

Mrs. Renelli said yesterday she and her husband brought the court action in an effort to spotlight conditions at Willowbrook. Mr. and Mrs.

Renelli's attorney, Congressman Mario Biaggi of the Bronx, said he hopes that a ruling in favor of the Renellis will benefit all patients at Willowbrook, as well as those throughout the state.

Assistant State Attorney General Judith Gordon has conceded that the state is under

an obligation to care for Willowbrook's residents. She maintains that the school took steps to safeguard residents, but it cannot prevent or be held responsible for all accidents at the institution.

Adrienne appeared briefly yesterday at the courthouse before being returned to Willowbrook, where she is being kept in the school's medical building under a court order.

Among the allegations of Adrienne's parents is that she had been beaten and assaulted at the school. Her mother estimated she had suffered more than 100 injuries while at the institution.

Under cross-examination by Mrs. Gordon, Mrs. Howell said she never saw an attendant or a hospital employe assault a patient during the nine years she has been at the school.

Mrs. Howell, who had Adrienne in her ward from last October until February, told of one accident last January when she said Adrienne suffered an epileptic seizure and fell to the floor, suffering a swollen eye.

She estimated she had five "assaults" daily in her ward in which patients suffered various injuries.

Mrs. Howell, under questioning by Biaggi's law partner, Bernard Ehrlich, said she applied for a job at Willowbrook in 1963. "I just walked in and asked for a job," she said. There were no requirements for the position. Her only prior experience was that of a factory worker.

She said she then underwent a three-week indoctrination period in which she was instructed in child care, "TPR" (temperature, pulse and respiration) and how to administer medication. In regard to medication, she said she was instructed on how "to use the right patient, the right dosage at the right time."

In Building 22, which houses the severely retarded, Mrs. Howell said she was never

given specific instructions on how to care for each patient. When Adrienne was assigned to her ward in October, she was merely informed that Adrienne had to be fed, given medication and supervised.

No one ever told her that Adrienne had the ability to learn to feed herself, as experts for the petitioners have testified. Mrs. Howell said she tried to toilet train Adrienne and to teach her to eat with a utensil, but gave it up after about a week.

She estimated she had about half an hour in the morning to feed breakfast to approximately 30 patients. Following breakfast, she said Adrienne as well as others received what she indicated was the only training program, known as "Activity of Daily Living."

Whatever training Adrienne received in the ward was obtained through her, Mrs. Howell said.

Mrs. Howell said the school had monthly meetings with supervisors and others, including attendants, to discuss the progress of patients and

determine what programs they could take part in, but she indicated that in Adrienne's case this consisted only of Activity of Daily Living, interspaced with outdoor trips three times a week.

She said Adrienne received two medications — a tranquilizer and an anti-seizure medicine which was placed in her food.

During the nine years she has been at Willowbrook, Mrs. Howell said she knew of no in-service training programs for attendants.

If she saw residents fighting, Mrs. Howell said she tried to separate them and, if possible, distract them. She said she did not punish them for such behavior.

The hearing resumes today.