

# 35 complete Willowbrook aide program

By POLLY KUMMEL

Thirty-five more Staten Islanders who had previously been on public assistance were graduated yesterday from Willowbrook State School's mental health aide training program.

The program is supervised, planned and administered by the city Human Resources Administration.

"It's been a beautiful two weeks. I hope the next three (of full time on-the-job training) will be as beautiful as the first two," said Doris Thomas of 153 Brabant St., Mariners Harbor.

John Dalles Jr. of 361 Jersey St., New Brighton, expressed enthusiasm over the past two weeks of classes.

"They built up pride in us, so we can help the kids here, and they taught us the patience we need to do the best job we possibly can," he said.

"Educational and fun. I learned a lot and will learn a lot more. I know I'll enjoy working here," said Georgia Taylor, 238 York Ave., New Brighton.

Edward Kelly, a graduate of the first class (today's was the fourth since June), said, "This job is harder than any other. No one can teach you beyond a certain point. You have to have it inside, and what you have to have is love."

Kelly said the program is the best thing that ever happened to him and credits it for curing his ulcer: "I'm so busy here and so concerned with other people that I don't have time to stew about my own problems."

Kelly said that one of his first patients was a little boy who refused not only to talk but to take any interest in life. Kelly kept talking to the child, pointing out things that were going on around the grounds.

"After almost two weeks I was ready to give up," he recalled. Then one morning I came in and he looked at me and pointed to a convertible outside and said 'car.' Now, that meant more to me than \$1 million," he said.

As a Civil Service employe like all the graduates, Kelly has his eye on the benefits.

"Next year I'm going to start college and take a few courses. I've already gotten my high school diploma, since I've been here, and then I'll go full time to become a registered nurse, so I can do even more for the residents here."

Yesterday's graduation was not a typical one. No strangers got up to talk for hours. Their friends did the talking for a few minutes, after a picnic lunch. The Rev. John Serpydodic, head of Catholic Charities for Staten Island, stressed the importance of the occasion by calling the graduates "the sunshine of Willowbrook."

Clarence Leach, director of the training program, told the group to "keep up the good work. We expect great things from you."

Farrell Jones, commissioner of the Social Services Department, said people who graduated from the program earlier this summer are already doing great things.

"The dedication of the staff and the trainees is so impressive. It is one of the things that has given me the most joy in a long time. The staff response to the new groups has been tremendous and the trainees find it fantastic to have a job helping someone else," Jones said.

"We're hoping to expand the program to other places. One of the reasons, I think, that this has been so successful is that the jobs at Willowbrook are real jobs, not just the make work projects for persons on public assistance," Jones noted.

Jones said that in a conversation with Dr. Miodrag Ristic, Willowbrook director, Ristic told him he was very pleased and encouraged by the attitude of the trainee because it helps dispel the general opinion of people on welfare.

Arthur Seltzer, one of the program's instructors, said that one of the more unusual facets of the program is that it has a complete follow-up on the trainees, how they like their jobs and things they'd like to see changed.

Seltzer noted that so far the program has experienced a very low attrition rate, with most people who finish the training staying on and looking to a future working at the school.

"And the city and the state are really cooperating on this program? There's none of the usual see-sawing back and forth between them," Seltzer added.

Ava Newcombe of 233 Van Pelt Ave., Mariners Harbor, said: "Art Seltzer is a great teacher. He really breezed us through the program. Because of him I'm confident that I can do a really good job here."