

Federal study says

Willowbrook School too big

By DAVID KUSNET

The contrast between standard conditions at Willowbrook State School and the relative success of Queens State School apparently led a team of federal researchers to recommend the decentralization of services for the mentally retarded in a report issued yesterday.

The group, which had visited Willowbrook for several hours Feb. 28 and later visited Queens and spoke with state officials, recommended the replacement of large institutions for the retarded by community-based services.

While describing several programs already being undertaken to relieve conditions at state institutions, the report also maintains that the state has failed to tap available funds for community-based programs.

Existing programs operated by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, the Social Security Administration and the Labor Department could finance rehabilitation services for the retarded and group homes, the report notes.

The federal Rehabilitation Services Administration is now working with state agencies to devise these programs.

Immediate steps being taken by HEW include grants for a screening program to select Willowbrook patients for eventual "individualized treatment and return to the community." Funds are also being allocated to studies of the role of parent and community groups and the interrelations of existing state programs.

The team claims credit for spurring the funding of these

programs.

Conceding that "the crisis at Willowbrook had precipitated the initial concern" for a federal review of state programs, the report says problems at the Staten Island institution include "size, overcrowding, understaffing, high staff turnover, low staff morale, high rates of absenteeism, inaccessibility, and a large percentage of severely

and profoundly retarded residents."

In contrast, the researchers found Queens State School to be "community oriented," with residents leaving the facility for work or school programs. More individualized attention is also available in Queens than at Willowbrook, the report maintains.

The researchers attribute the greater success of Queens to its smaller size. However, they note that Willowbrook faces the additional burden of having to treat severely retarded and physically handicapped children under the age of 5.

The care of these children, with their special needs, deprived other residents of adequate treatment services, according to the report.

In the theoretical discussions

which occupy most of the report's 118 pages, the researchers note the importance of individual attention for patients and their involvement in the outside world.

The researchers also recommend the focusing of the efforts of outside groups through a child advocacy commission and the coordination of state and local services through a new state coordinating committee.

HEW Secretary Elliot Richardson appointed the team at the request of Gov. Rockefeller and U.S. Sen. Jacob Javits after reports in the Advance on conditions at Willowbrook focused public attention on institutions for the retarded.

An Advance reporter was the only press representative allowed to accompany the researchers during their visit to Willowbrook.