

9 more Willowbrook children in a new life



Former Willowbrook State School patients play under the supervision of social workers in their new home at Kings County State School in Brooklyn.

S.I. ADVANCE PHOTOS BY BARRY SCHWARTZ

By TIMOTHY JARRELL

Nine children started a new life in a new home yesterday.

They are the third group of Brooklyn youngsters to be transferred to the \$27 million Kings County State School in Brooklyn from Willowbrook State School.

Those connected with the shift to the Brooklyn school, which opened Sept. 15, say it marks a changing attitude within the State Mental Hygiene Department.

Willowbrook was built when the mental patient was supposed to be hidden away in

drab surroundings and under substandard conditions. The new facility, on the other hand, is there to push "educables" back into society.

Jerry Large, head of rehabilitation services for King's County, said "While the patient is here we want to provide him with a family type situation."

Three two-story buildings, when filled, will house 96 patients. Another building will house 76. The smaller units are to develop closer contacts between patients and staff. Bedrooms are shared by only two patients, in contrast to Willowbrook, where children sleep in mass wards.

"One thing these kids understand," said Large, is that they are not with their parents, especially in an institution like Willowbrook where all the kids are thrown together."

The staff is dressed informally, and walls are brightly painted to eliminate an institutionalized look.

Staffers maintain the new center has a positive effect on 20 mentally retarded children previously transferred there from Willowbrook.

Mrs. Barbara White, a nurse in one unit, pointed to three patients among a small group that had already shown improvement since their arrival four weeks ago.

One 8-year-old child, confined to Willowbrook for three and one-half years, took a small sip of coffee from a cup she was holding. Mrs. White emphasized that when the child first came to Kings County she couldn't even hold an object.

"She is beginning to make sounds, letting you know she's corresponding with you," Mrs. White added.

The children are among 200 patients picked up from 2,900 Brooklyn children in Willowbrook. School authorities

estimate the rest of the 200 will be transferred by March 31.

Large said officials based selection on a child's capability for improving in his new home.

The school eventually will hold 750 residents. It is taking transfers from other hospitals and referrals in Brooklyn.

The new residents, confused and slightly frightened by the attention toward them, boarded a small school bus for the half-hour ride to their new home.

The attendants in white hugged them for the last time and handed them lollipops. One excited child was assured he was only going to another building at Willowbrook, after he became agitated.

As each child left the bus upon arriving at his new home, he was greeted by an "advocate," his personal guide for the next few days.

Most kids adjust very

rapidly, only having problems the first day in being somewhat disoriented, Large said.

Doctors will evaluate the children in the next couple of days, but for now they settled down to play with their guides, and adjust to their new environment.

In a nearby playroom, children transferred from Willowbrook in the past month were singing:

"When you're happy and you know it

And you really want to show it

Clap your hands