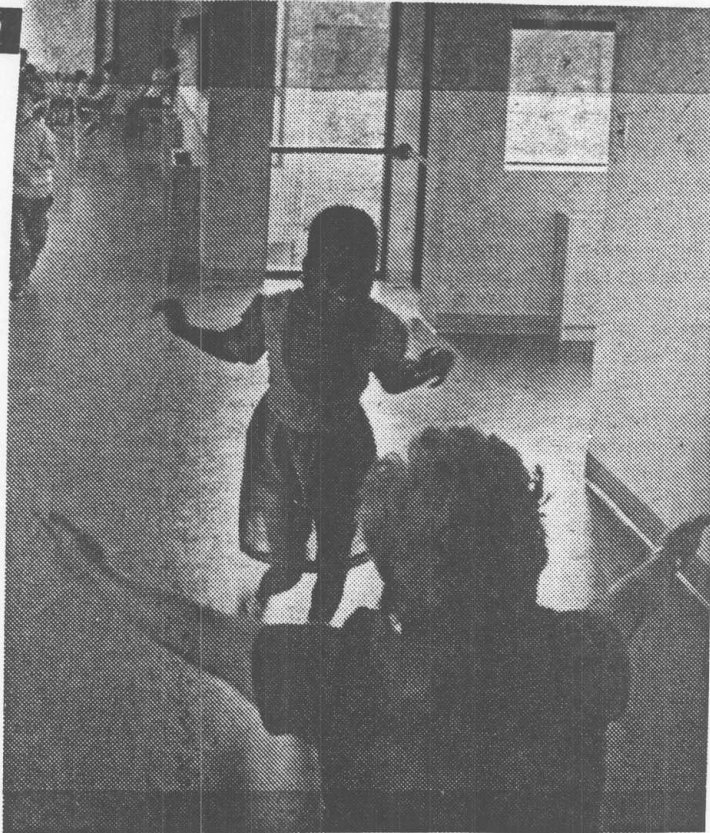


Brooklyn Today

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All You Need Is Love

By Lesley Goldberg

It is not a long bus ride from Staten Island to Spring Creek but the 20 children who made that trip Nov. 21 might well have been going to a different planet.

For Staten Island's Willowbrook State School for the mentally retarded is no more than a holding pen where residents sleep 70 to a ward, where the one staff person caring for 20 handicapped people has no time to teach them basic living skills like self-feeding, dressing and toilet training, and where there is no hope.

And the newly opened Kings County State School, at 888 Fountain Ave., has bedrooms for two, one staff person for each five residents, and an opportunity for retarded children to learn to be functioning human beings. The school is so new that tags still hang from furniture and many of the building have not yet been certified for occupancy.

Colors guide children

Everything at the new school, which will eventually house 750 Brooklyn mentally retarded children, including 200 from Willowbrook, is in bright oranges, yellows, reds and blues. This is not merely for aesthetic reasons, although the color helps change an institution to a home, but rather, that children who can't read or remember will be able to find their way around by searching out the right color.

The aim of the school is as much self-sufficiency as people with I.Q.s of around 35 can attain. This

also includes individualized programs for resocialization, basic educational skill development, vocational training therapy, and training in daily living skills. The school even has a few studio apartments where those almost ready to go to work will be able to live on their own in a sheltered atmosphere.

The 29 children now living in one of the school's eight buildings were busy adjusting to their new home. They watched Bugs Bunny on television in small groups, ran in and out of their rooms showing off new toys, and tried to hug everyone in sight.

Compare notes

"Sit down," commanded 7-year-old Victor to a visiting reporter who was trying to take notes while being tickled by Gary, also 7. Victor wangled a pencil away from the reporter and proceeded to do a fair imitation of the news gathering process by scribbling in a picture book. Then he and the reporter compared notes.

In Iain Lowrie's photographs, Robin [top left] runs to greet Bernice Douglas, the school's director of public relations, and below gets a reassuring hug. At top right, Charlie, his sensitive face shining, relaxes under the tender, protective care of Sara Wagh. Below, Ms. Douglas makes friends with a new youngster, sitting in the hall outside his bedroom.

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