

British native has soft spot for playgrounds

By ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS

Kenneth Young specializes in soft assault courses, and he has found more call for them in New York state than in all of England, his native country.

Young, a 26-year-old environmental designer, creates and installs padded interior playgrounds, particularly in institutions for mentally disturbed or developmentally disabled children and adults.

He has devised a number of engaging phrases to describe the playgrounds, including "soft assault course," "soft space" and "forgiving ambience." Proof of his labeling is on view at the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook, where Young has outfitted adjoining rooms on the second floor of Building 2 in primary colors and vinyl.

Whatever assault goes on in these rooms is directed at inanimate objects and is, Young believes, conducive to developmental center residents' well being.

"The playgrounds are a secure, safe environment for recreational therapy which, in fact, the staff enjoy just as much as the residents," Young says. "If a resident is not alert enough to initiate his own action, the equipment will motivate the staff to initiate."

Modular, geometric shapes in various sizes, some hanging from the ceiling like a forest of punching bags, comprise the playgrounds. Each component is squashy, and even walls and floors are wrapped in four to six inches of polyethylene foam. The heavy vinyl skin on each part was cautiously fabricated, it's non-toxic, anti-bacterial, fire retardant and "made in the U.S.A."

"New Jersey," Young points out, "has an abundance of plastic manufacturers. Our only letdown is that we are an oil-based product."

Young, and his younger brother and partner, Michael, came from England to living and business quarters on Carmine Street, in Greenwich Village two years ago. A graduate of the College of East Anglia, Norwich, Young studied fine arts with an eye toward interior design.

His preoccupation with playgrounds was sparked while working as a summer counselor at children's institutions, where he was struck by the lack of play equipment.

With his rangy build, stern face, and precise British accent, Young hardly seems the type to worry about lending pizzazz to a gray-walled existence.

Nonetheless, he has plunged in, not only at Willowbrook, but at Staten Island Aid for Retarded Children, Castleton Corners, at metropolitan area foster homes and on Ward's Island. Before leaving England, he contributed similar facilities to a school for the blind in Edinburgh and to a hospital for epileptics in Surrey.

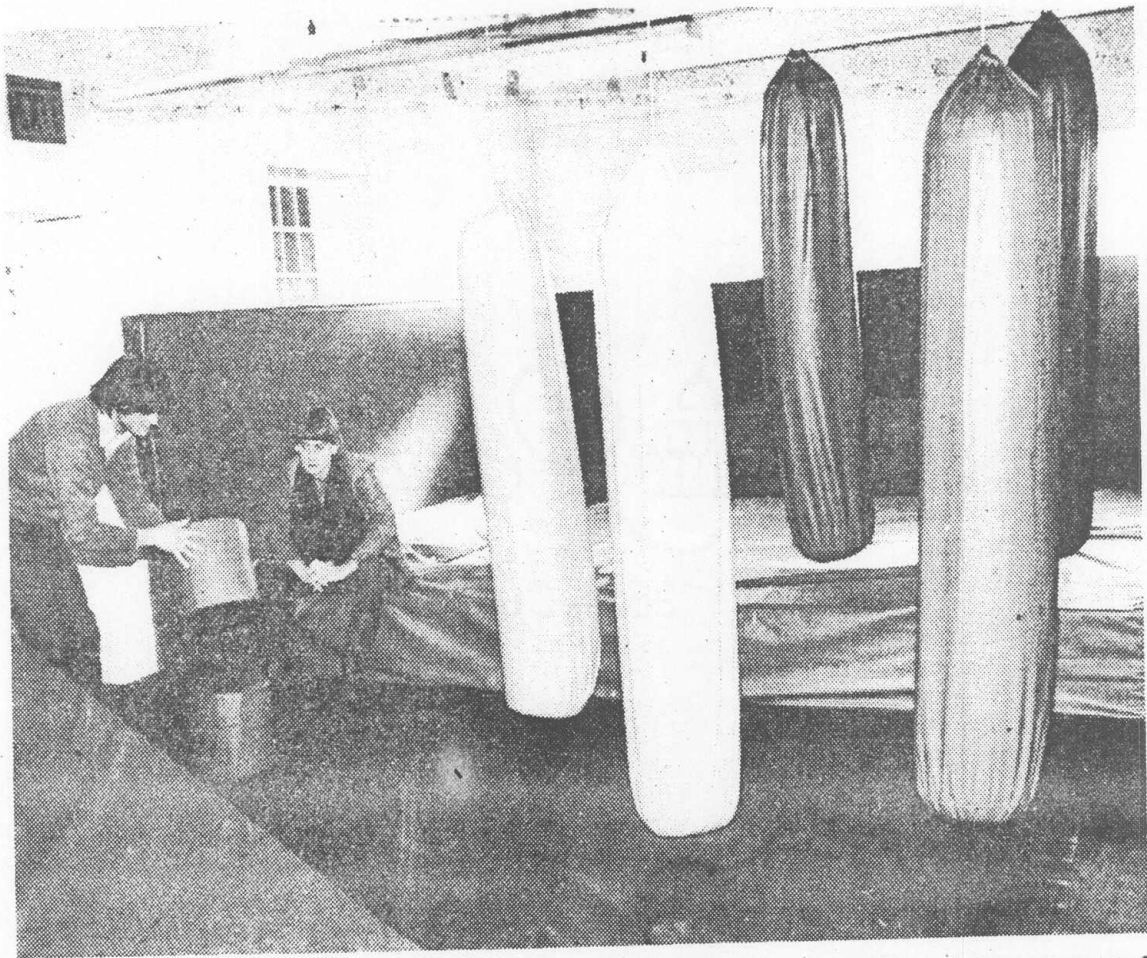
Recreational therapy in America, he asserts, is three to four years behind Swedish, German or English programs. "There's less implementation here," he explains. "But people are very receptive to new ideas."

The developmental center's playgrounds have been in place nearly 18 months. Young's services were retained by the Play Schools Association, Inc., a voluntary agency which has trained therapy aides at the center. Joseph Corrado, executive director of the Manhattan agency, has issued a favorable evaluation of the playgrounds, and adds, "If they can work at Willowbrook, they'll work anywhere."

Willowbrook's equipment, worth between 8 and 10 thousand dollars, was designed and installed free of charge, on a trial basis. Young, who visits occasionally, has been perturbed to note that the pair of rooms is generally locked and empty.

Although New York was alluring for its abundance of institutions, Young has been frustrated by the "unfortunate" shortage of state funds. His current inclination, he confides, is to "go west, young man."

27018



Michael Young, left, and Kenneth Young try the "forgiving ambiance" of a playground they constructed for the Staten Island Developmental Center. S.I. Advance Photo by Robert Parsens

Page 2 of 2

Special Olympics sets disco party

The Staten Island Special Olympics Committee, meeting yesterday in the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook, discussed plans for a Valentine's Day disco party Feb. 21 at 8 p.m. in Tut's, Concord. Tickets are \$5 per person and are available in advance from Doris Grell of Cheves Ave., Westerleigh.

Plans were also made for a roller disco party March 27 in Skate Odyssey, South Beach. Attending the 10th anniversary dinner March 26 in the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, Manhattan, was discussed.

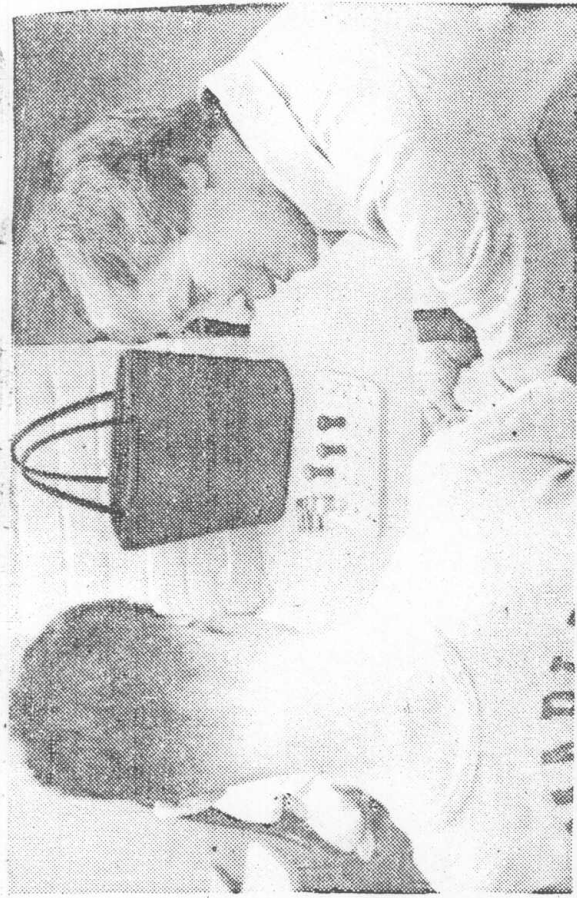
The committee accepted a check for \$1,150 from Richard Potter, a teacher at Moore Catholic High School, Graniteville, from the proceeds of a school marathon he organized with students.

The next meeting will be March 5.

Foster grandparents are needed



Charles K. Smith (photo left) works with youngster as Nettle Evans, coordinator of foster grandparents' program, looks on.



Marie Fecci, a foster grandparent, helps young man with learning aids at Staten Island Development Center.

By MARY ENGELS

IF YOU ARE 60 years of age or older, have a warm place in your heart for children in need and could use some extra income, the Staten Island Developmental Center wants you.

"Foster grandparents are one of our greatest assets," said Mrs. Nettie Evans, a foster grandparent and senior-companion coordinator at the center.

A foster grandparent program began a few years ago at the center with the purpose of providing the elderly with low incomes an opportunity to make some extra money and to help disadvantaged

children, such as the mentally retarded.

"They work with our residents under the age of 21," Evans said. "It is usually on a one-to-one basis and they generally help the residents by preparing them for the daily living activities."

Provide companionship

They also provide companionship, emotional support and encouragement to the residents in all activities in which they are involved, she said.

"The difference between the foster grandparent and the senior companion is that the senior companion cares for residents over 21 years old by helping them make the transition to community living."

Both programs are in need of more volunteers, she said.

"We have funding for 50 foster grandparents and only 35 are in the program," she said. "As for the senior companions, there is funding for 30 persons and there are only 15 volunteers. If we don't get more people, we stand to lose the funding money."

Reassured on income

Mrs. Evans said that the elderly who join the program need not fear that they will lose the small income they already have. "They will be provided with a stipend and other benefits which enables them to participate without losing anything," she said.

One drawback that the program is faced with is the time that the volunteers must spend in it, four hours a day, five days a week. Many elderly are reluctant to commit themselves to that length of time. Some have asked if they can serve less time but the rules cannot be bent, she said.

Since the program started it has mutually benefited both parties, she said. "It gives the elderly an opportunity to help those young people who are mentally retarded and are often deprived of normal relationships with adults. At the same time the residents often find an advocate in their foster grandparent or senior companion, who will call us when they

think something is wrong or not being done properly," she said.

Jo Morrill, director of the deaf and blind program at the center, praised the foster grandparents for their help.

"They tend to give the residents that extra special care as the youngsters learn about the activities of daily living. It is gratifying watching how our residents often respond to the foster grandparent quicker than those on staff."

Glad she joined

Mrs. Mary Snyder, 66, a foster grandparent assigned to the deaf and blind program, said she was pleased that children await her arrival every day. "It makes me feel glad I joined the program. At first I was skeptical and wondered if I could take working with the retarded. Now I consider them my children, my grandchildren I mean."

Mrs. Olga Bowry, 62, said, "You get to grow quite fond of the residents. Actually, I look forward to coming to the center every day. I love working with the children. All I want to do is make them happy."

Anyone interested in becoming a foster grandparent or senior companion who can fill the requirements (low income men and women over 60 who are no longer in the regular work force) should contact... Nettie Evans at the center.

Press barred from talks on Willowbrook

Court-appointed monitors of the Staten Island Developmental Center met yesterday in Manhattan to review state plans to virtually empty the Willowbrook institution within 14 months.

Results of the monitors' deliberations were not immediately known because the monitor, the Willowbrook Review Panel, barred the press and public from attending.

Reporters maintain that the meetings must be public under the state's Open Meetings Law because the panel's \$300,000 annual budget is funded entirely by state taxpayers.

The state's plan would reduce the developmental center's population from nearly 1,700 to 250 by April, 1981.

If the seven-member panel rejects the placement plan, it is empowered to bar its implementation in federal court.

A spokesman for the panel originally said that reporters would be able to attend the meeting in Manhattan's Summit Hotel, but panel members said that they would be inhibited in their "frank" deliberations of the state plan with reporters present.

Advance reporters Bruce Alpert and Anemona Hartocollis were among those barred from the meeting.

Island leads city in proportion of group homes

By BRUCE ALPERT
Advance Staff Writer

ALBANY — A state report says that, on a per capita basis, Staten Island has a higher percentage of group homes than other boroughs.

But the report, requested by Island lawmakers concerned that the Island is becoming oversaturated with such facilities, says the borough still has room to accommodate new group homes that will be needed as the state moves to phase out the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook, by April 1981.

The report, prepared by the New York State Health Planning Commission, recommends, however, that all social service agencies, including the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, limit placements to boroughs or counties where the residents were born or where their families reside. The state has already agreed to place residents from the Willowbrook developmental center in their home communities.

The 12-page report says foster and troubled children from outside the borough have traditionally been placed in group homes and other community facilities on the Island, particularly on the North Shore. The commission suggests that some of these facilities be "closed by attrition." As residents leave these facilities, the report said, the beds should not be filled, unless a bed is with a youth from the Island.

Also recommended by the commission is a central "clearing house" for community facilities to assure that no area is oversaturated with group homes. Community-based facilities should not be located within a quarter-mile of a similar facility, the report said.

The report said the Island has twice the percentage of group homes per capita than other boroughs. And it says Community Board 1 has the highest ratio of such facilities on the Island.

More than 80 percent of the Island beds are sponsored by the Department of Social Services for foster care and for juvenile delinquents.

"While it is apparent that Staten Island, in fact, does have a higher ratio of

community facilities than other counties of New York City," the report said, "this largely results from the disproportionate placement of non-residents in Staten Island facilities of all types."

The study estimated that the borough will need an additional 356 beds in group homes and other community residences in the next three to five years.

The report said, however, that if future placements in the borough are limited to residents who were either born or who have relatives on the Island, the ratio of group homes will conform to the rest of the city and will not disrupt local communities.

Cora Hoffman, a spokeswoman for the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, said the agency has agreed to place residents slated to be transferred from the Staten Island Developmental Center into facilities in their "home communities."

"We will be happy to concur with the recommendations, including the clearing house, if it could reach its decision in a timely fashion," Ms. Hoffman said.

The agency has already contracted with a non-profit Westchester-based agency that tracks all community facilities to avoid "oversaturation" of any community, she said.

But an aide to Assemblywoman Elizabeth A. Connelly of West Brighton said the agency had proposed inappropriate sites for community residences. Recently, he said, the state proposed to place four retarded residents in an apartment, located only one block from an adult home that houses psychiatric patients.

Only after Mrs. Connelly intervened, did the state drop the "ridiculous" proposal, the aide said.

State Sen. John J. Marchi of Ward Hill said he has not yet seen the report but concurs with its findings that placement should be made based on a resident's home community.

He said the recommendation re-enforces his belief that a Brooklyn-based religious group, Beth Rifka, should be denied permission to open the Danube

Nursing Home in Concord.

"It would be OK if we had the hospital beds," Marchi said. "But we are the only county in the state where our hospitals are operating close to capacity."

Officials from the state Department of Social Services and private agencies that operate facilities for youth on the Island were unavailable yesterday to comment on the report.

But, most observers agree, it is doubtful that private agencies will be willing to phase out their residential facilities

in the borough by limiting future placements to Island residents.

The state Health Planning Commission, headed by Gov. Carey's health adviser Dr. Kevin Cahill, is mandated by federal law to coordinate the delivery of health and social services in the state.

A spokesman said the report was prepared by commission staff and officials from the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities, the state Office of Health Systems Management, the Department of Social Services and staff from both Marchi's and Mrs. Connelly's office.

How state report defines group home facilities

The New York State Health Planning Commission report breaks its statistics into five kinds of community facilities. It discusses the number of such facilities per 1,000 population in each of the five boroughs.

The report further divides Staten Island into the borough's three community board districts. District 1 covers the Island's North Shore; Board 2, the mid-Island, and Board 3, the South Shore. Here are the report's findings:

¶ Transitional living centers are defined as facilities designed to meet immediate and short-term needs such as a sobering-up station, a halfway house, or shelter for adults. The borough has .023

beds per 1,000, about equal to the citywide average. Board 2 has the highest density of such facilities on the Island.

¶ Residential facilities are defined as homes with 14 or fewer beds that "look just like" surrounding homes and accommodate the retarded, former patients at state psychiatric hospitals and foster or troubled youth. The Island has 1.05 beds per 1,000 population, compared to a citywide average of 0.47 beds per 1,000. Board 1, which houses the majority of the borough's group homes for the retarded and foster and troubled youth, has the highest ratio of residential facilities in the borough.

¶ Community institutions are defined

as programs with 15 or more beds, including adult residential and alcoholism facilities. The borough has 4.20 beds per 1,000 population, compared with the citywide average of 1.95 beds per 1,000. Board 1 has the highest density of such facilities on the Island.

¶ Community health care institutions include proprietary psychiatric hospitals, nursing homes, adult homes and large community-based intermediate care facilities, such as the Nina Eaton Center at South Beach Psychiatric Center. The Island has 12.31 beds per 1,000 population, compared with the citywide average of 6.18 per 1,000. Board 1

has the highest ratio of such facilities in the borough.

¶ Segregated institutions include facilities such as the Staten Island Developmental Center, South Beach Psychiatric Center and Arthur Kill Correctional Center. The Island has 11.62 beds per 1,000 compared with a citywide average of 1.98. But when the resident population at the Staten Island Developmental Center drops to 250, which the state plans to achieve before a court-imposed deadline of April 1981, the Island ratio will drop to 4.06, the commission said. Board 2, which houses two of the three institutions, has the highest ratio of segregated facilities on the Island.

Our opinion

Island needs group home relief

Staten Island has earned a deserved reputation as a community where, by and large, people are willing to help those less fortunate than themselves. That probably explains why, with a few exceptions, Islanders generally have been willing to accept the establishment of group homes in neighborhood after neighborhood.

But now a report, prepared by the state Health Planning Commission at the request of Island legislators, has suggested that the understanding of Islanders may have been systematically taken advantage of by some of the agencies operating group homes.

The Island, the report found, has twice as many group homes as any other borough, as measured on a per capita basis. And a disproportionate number of that disproportionate share of homes, the report added, are found in the North and East Shore communities within the boundaries of Community Board 1.

Compounding the rather startling disclosure of the concentration of group homes of all sorts on the Island is the planning commission's finding that many of those residing in group homes here are from other boroughs.

Incredibly the report — after conceding the overabundance of group homes and the fact that many of the group home beds are occupied by non-Islanders — concludes that the Island should be able to accommodate some additional homes to house persons to be discharged from the Staten Island Developmental Center.

We don't know now the state would describe the convoluted logic that enables it to conclude that a community with an obvious oversupply of group home beds

ought to accept some more.

But we do know what we call the practice — dumping. The state seems to be intent upon placing the greatest number of group homes possible in a community that has offered relatively little resistance to group home siting thus far.

It should be clear that our objection is not to group homes or those who live in them, whether the individuals be orphans, juvenile delinquents or persons with developmental disabilities. We do object, rather, to the state's attitude that the Island should be expected to support a proportionally greater share of group homes in terms of population than any other borough.

Unless the responsible agencies are willing to act independently, the Legislature should order several actions to correct the borough-to-borough group home imbalance.

First, there ought to be an absolute cap on group homes on the Island, so no more of the facilities could be opened here. That would grant the Island needed relief and guarantee that additional group homes will be sited in boroughs now carrying less than their fair share.

In addition, procedures should be established so that non-Islanders residing in Island group homes might be transferred to homes in their own home community or county on an expedited basis. Vacancies created by that process could then be filled by Islanders in need of group home care, without establishing additional group home facilities.