



Photo by Denis O'Keefe

Thora Nordlund, vocational counselor at the Vocational Training Center for the Handicapped, shows Albert Robidoux and Alexandra DeMasi of Willowbrook School in New York how clients at the center learn job skills by disassembling motor parts for recycling

TRAINING CENTER CALLED MODEL

Willowbrook School aides visit Morris

By JOAN OSTERHOUDT

Officials from the Willowbrook State School in New York toured a Morris County training center yesterday to learn how meaningful programs can guide the handicapped toward self-reliance.

Three staff members from Willowbrook on Staten Island, came to the Vocational Training Center for the Handicapped in Morristown, one of the oldest vocational training centers for the handicapped in New Jersey.

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The Willowbrook School was a center of controversy last year after a series of television exposes, and parent protests which charged the school provided little more than custodial care and lacked good patient care and rehabilitation programs for the retarded.

Albert Robidoux, chief of community service at Willowbrook said he came for the tour because the Morristown center enjoys "a good reputation for helping people learn social and vocational skills."

Mrs. Phyllis Sanftner is executive director of the Voca-

tional Training Center. Her philosophy is to get as many people as possible back into the community by helping them achieve the skills that will make them more independent.

The program recognizes that all handicapped persons are not capable of total independence. Some may achieve the goal of employment in industry, others may work in sheltered workshops. Others may not achieve the vocational skills needed for employment but can be placed in day care programs with activities that offer more than a lifetime of institutionalization, a center spokesman said.

The clients travel to and from the center on their own. At the center they may perform simple assembly jobs. The goal is to teach them how to report for work, and get along with co-workers and supervisors.

Specific job skills in clerical, cafeteria and custodial work are also taught.

The idea is to create a "mini-world of work" according to vocational counselor Thora Nordlund.

"Just coming to the center

is therapeutic," she said. "Rubbing elbows with the public and taking public transportation, they learn to lose their fear of travel and people."

About 90 people come to the center each day. In addition to the retarded, the program serves patients from Greystone Psychiatric Hospital, who report each day as they would for any job, and return to the hospital at night. The physically and visually handicapped are also trained at the center.

The center sub-contracts with private agencies for assembly work that will provide experience for the clients.

Robidoux said more and more Willowbrook patients are leaving the hospital for sheltered workshops, and one of the purposes of the tour to Morristown was to help the state school staff keep abreast of the kinds of services offered in such facilities.

Accompanying Robidoux on the tour were Alexandra DeMasi, rehabilitation counselor, and William Russon, a psychiatric social worker from Willowbrook.