

# Glider Fund paying dividends for kids

By ROBERT MIRALDI

Hija Lopez, legs stiff in braces, glanced alertly around for encouragement and then began what must have seemed to her a monumental trek. She held tightly to the bannister and dragged her legs up the stairs.

Each step was Mount Everest. Each step was a crowning achievement. Then she climaxed the journey, dragging her weary little body over the last step and onto the adjacent landing. She turned quickly around.

An ear-to-ear grin split her face as she appreciatively accepted the cheers and applause of the therapists who stood nearby.

Moments later, the journey became well worth the struggle as Hija sat on the accompanying slide and whisked down the "new toy" that's captured the hearts of so many of the retarded children at Willowbrook State School.

The tiny paraplegic, who has never known the joy of walking, is just one benefitting—mentally and physically—from this toy made possible by the Willowbrook Glider Fund.

Established five months ago, the fund has netted \$5,000 in contributions from Staten Islanders. Now the children are starting to reap the rewards.

"The investment in that toy alone is worth it, seeing Hija able to do that," Miss Frances Ryan, administrative unit chief in the intensive therapy unit, commented as she watched the children slide off the toy.

"I wouldn't do that when I was a kid," she laughed.

The therapists were equally impressed with the merits of the first heavy-duty piece of equipment the Glider Fund has produced.

"If people could see this unit they would see how helpful it is, how the kids love it," Miss Connie Yovich, recreational therapist, said.

"Even the crippled kids can use this one. It's just fun. We have to tell them to stop."

Occupational therapist Carolyn Holland agreed that the toy is "a good idea. We could use more like it," she admitted.



Willowbrook State School children make their way up the stairs and then gleefully slide down this new therapeutic toy under the watchful eyes of two therapists.

S.T. Advance Photo by Barry G. Schwartz

"They can't get hurt and it's something to play on."

"We've seen very good progress. Some even crawl up to slide down. That's an incentive to reach the top. Before they had to climb a ladder. It was work. They were scared."

"Now, they have a great time, have races and pile up on each other," she said.

"It helps each kid in a different way."

"There is a very great need for units of this type," Mel Hicks of the volunteer office added. "We'll be thankful when the next one is delivered."

The next one is on its way, according to fund director Guy Molinari. More units have been made possible, in large part, by contribution of \$900 from the Loyal Order of Moose.

"The children needed the equipment," John Beyer, a governor

responded.

Now the children are responding.