

Upstate symposium focuses on Willowbrook patient care

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SPECIAL TO THE ADVANCE

SYRACUSE, N.Y. — Willowbrook State School received attention again this weekend in Syracuse, where more than 100 persons gathered for a three-day symposium entitled, "Alternatives to Institutionalization."

The conference was co-sponsored by the Institute for Community Development, a Syracuse nonprofit organization, and the Center on Human Policy of Syracuse University for those concerned with developing community-based alternatives for persons with special needs.

A film, "Willowbrook," was one of six films shown in a program that also included panel discussion groups and workshops planned to deal with the mentally retarded, physically handicapped, geriatrically incapacitated, mentally ill, the aged and the criminal elements of the community.

The symposium participants included those who have already incorporated alternative approaches in their institutions as well as those interested in doing so.

A major roadblock to establishing alternative programs has been the resistance of administrators. This problem was especially dealt with in a workshop on the rights of institutional employees led by a Staten Island lawyer, Richard Levy.

Levy has represented professionals and ward workers of institutions who have tried to implement change and found that in doing so they have met with dismissal or other forms of resistance.

He stressed that the rights of patients were closely related to the rights of employees and added that an alliance was necessary among disabled

persons, their parents, and ward workers and professionals.

His formula for change in this area was, "Organization equals power, equals workers' rights."

Levy is a member of the Policy and Action Conference, a group organized as a consumer lobby for those concerned with all forms of handicaps.

Other Island members of PAC attending the conference were Mrs. Alice Sutterlin, R. William Russom and Dr. William Bronston.

Russom, a graduate student at Rutgers University is currently working in the recently established community services unit at Willowbrook which is responsible for moving people from the institution into the community.

This concept of breaking down large institutions into smaller living units is part of a nationwide movement concerned with providing more humane care for institutional residents.

The switch for residents from total dependency within institutions to a more responsible, decision-making situation has been a major problem encountered by advocates of the movement.

Halfway houses, which help institutional residents learn the

skills necessary to become members of the community, have been established to deal with this problem.

The two halfway houses currently being planned for Staten Island were cited during the symposium by Timothy Casey, a member of the community services unit and of the Willowbrook Benevolent Society.

Other Islanders attending the conference were Richmond College students Moya Kessig and Michelle Benkovic.

In keeping with the alter-

native theme of the three-day program, participants were given the choice of staying in private homes, hotels or institutions in the Syracuse area.

The Institute for Community Development, under the direction of Dr. Robert Cohen, is one of a handful of community psychology organizations throughout the nation.

The Center on Human Policy is a Syracuse University-based organization dealing with instituting more humane services for people with special needs.