

Willowbrook: Vets Really First Class

By MARY ENGELS

"If we can get more soldiers to go out on the field then maybe we'll have won the battle."

Farrell Jones, first deputy administrator for the Human Resources Administration, was addressing the first group of veterans that had successfully completed a three-week training program to become fully paid case aides at the Willowbrook State School in Staten Island.

Jones, who had initiated the training program almost a year ago said it was begun to train people on welfare to get jobs and they had received excellent cooperation from the Willowbrook facility.

"This program shows what can happen when the city and state work together to solve problems. By finding and screening the workers, we've provided Willowbrook, over the past year, with 161 workers, earning from \$5,400 to \$6,400 a year," Jones said.

"Though this is the eighth such class to graduate it was the first in which they had recruited the workers from the Veterans offices.

Island Is Represented

Art Seltzer, training director for the HRA program at Willowbrook, said they got the most response from the veterans office at 90 Myrtle Ave. in Brooklyn.

"Ten of our men came from there, others from the New York City Division of Veterans Affairs on W. 43d St. and still others from the Staten Island office," Seltzer said.

Of the 19 vets, four had served in Vietnam. There were also a few girls in the program who had asked for the opportunity to work at the school.

Seltzer explained that the program is a tough one.

"We put the applicants through what I call a 'stress interview' explaining in advance what they may be up against with some of the residents.

"Then when the program begins we follow up with an orientation, a series of lectures and some 19 hours of word observation. We see how they relate to the residents, also give them an opportunity of working one day in the building of their choice.

"With the tour of buildings they see the difficulties as well as the joys of what it's like to work at Willowbrook," said Seltzer.

"We're very selective in choosing our workers and they have to be dedicated people."

Setting up the program was a challenge but, as Seltzer states, "it's the most rewarding thing I've ever done."

The class apparently seconded this for they were unanimous in praise for the program and were looking forward to beginning their jobs at the school.

Larry Jones, from the Bronx, said that so far it had been quite an experience working with the retarded. I wanted to help and I'm glad I came."

Charles Knight and Kenneth Reynolds from Brownsville, Brooklyn, called the program "an eye-opener." And both agreed they were looking forward to their work among the residents.

John Washington, from Staten Island, felt that "everyone should see what this place is like." Jane

Gleason, from Stapleton said: "It's a great feeling to be helping someone less fortunate than yourself."

Two prior graduates of the HRA program, Mrs. Shirley Williams and Clayton Poole, from Staten Island, were on hand to explain to the graduating class what it has been like to work among the residents.

"We've seen definite progress in eating habits alone since we've been in Building Seven," said Poole. Mrs. Williams firmly agreed.

"Do you know they even say grace before the meal begins," Shirley beamed.

Admittedly most workers still have to be on a one-to-10 ratio in terms of worker residents though the population has been cut from 5,800 to 4,000 residents at Willowbrook.

How do the residents react to their new workers?

Their smiles were evident as they played and romped with the

workers and when last seen they were all heading for the softball field to have a game.

They looked like any group of youngsters as they headed for the field and it was nice to see good things happening at Willowbrook.

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