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Big Bird delighting youngsters gathered in the auditorium of Building Three at the Willowbrook State School on Staten Island

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Big Bird and Pals Greeted Warmly at Willowbrook

By LAURIE JOHNSTON
Big Bird, in his 15-pound costume of yellow turkey feathers, and four other members of the "Sesame Street" visit Willowbrook State School Staten Island yesterday in first performance of their "road show" before red-haired youngsters.

Excited, laughing teen-agers, seated in rows together, joined younger children in repeating after Bob McGrath, the cast leader, as they touched their hair and eyes: "This is my hair . . . my hair is beautiful. This is my skin . . . my skin is beautiful."
Linking hands, as he instructed, they lifted them high in overhead chains and repeated: "These are my friends . . . my friends are beautiful!"

and broke into applause, joyous shouts and a round of hugs. The visit was arranged by Hospital Audiences, Inc., a non-profit New York-based agency that takes musicians and other entertainers into hospitals, prisons and addiction centers and also escorts patients and inmates to circuses, concerts and similar events.
"Luis? Luis?" screamed David Gonzalez from his wheelchair to Emilio Delgado, who said he was "out to change the Chicano image" as proprietor of the Fix-It Shop on Sesame Street.
David, a 9-year-old described

by his teachers as "ordinarily so very quiet," was said to have "memorized all the 'Sesame Street' songs and most of the dialogue." Because he had begged so hard to attend the show, he was one of the few nonambulatory Willowbrook residents who did.
Nearly 200 seats in the auditorium were empty. Some teachers said it was partly for lack of staff to escort some children to the show, leaving others behind, or to bring more than a few in wheelchairs.
Beatrice Thomas, a teacher, said that educable and trainable Willowbrook children

"from the smallest up to the chronological age of 21" watched "Sesame Street" in their classrooms. Many more who are bedridden "watch by the hour" in their wards. A recreational therapist said that "about the best chance to work with one child alone is to have the rest of the class watch the show on TV."
Marilyn Desker, also a teacher, said that staff members had suggested that handicapped children "should be incorporated into the cast occasionally, so they wouldn't seem so unusual to normal children in the community."