

# Willowbrook blocked on half-way homes

By JOAN MOTYKA

Claiming Willowbrook State School is not one step closer to having two half-way homes than it was 13 months ago, the coordinator of the half-way home project at the facility charged the state Department of Mental Hygiene with unnecessarily delaying the program.

"We haven't been able to proceed any further than we did in July 1972," Tim Casey, the coordinator, claimed. "The state has been making it impossible to get moving. It hasn't put anything on paper for us, and that's blocking our efforts."

On July 18, 1972, Dr. Frederic Grunberg, then deputy commissioner for mental retardation, listed the establishment of two Staten Island half-way homes for Willowbrook residents as a high priority item.

Since then, however, plans for the two homes have been resting in limbo.

"There were a lot of items at Willowbrook that were high priority," claimed William Knowlton of the state agency. He added that the April court order demanding improved conditions and an increase in staff also detracted attention from the establishment of the half-way homes.

Half-way homes are an attempt to bridge the gap between institutional and community living. Residents have single or double rooms in homes in established neighborhoods. They do their own shopping and cooking, work out finances and gradually make themselves at home in a world they have been divorced from.

Supervision is usually provided on a full-time basis through live-in houseparents,

and additional staff is often employed.

According to Knowlton, house parents will live in the Staten Island homes and five new budget slots have been created to pay them. In addition, five Willowbrook employees will augment the staff of each home, but will not live in.

Casey claims he was told by a program analyst of the state department that there would be no house parents for the Island homes and that a total of five workers would staff the homes.

"It would be impossible to run the houses with the staff Albany is giving us," Casey asserted. "They're creating an emergency situation for themselves."

With a staff of five and a relief factor scale to allow for sick leave, absence without leave and vacations, there would be only one person on duty for each shift, Casey claimed.

He added that the 10 extra employes have not even been provided by Albany yet.

On June 4, Casey said, eight persons were told they would be hired to work in the half-way house, and would begin training at Willowbrook June 21. On June 6, they were told to ignore the June 4 memo.

Employes of the Community Services Unit at Willowbrook have been working for more than a year to get the half-way homes established on Staten Island, yet because they have gotten nothing in writing from the state agency, Casey claimed, their efforts have been blocked.

Their search for houses with six or seven bedrooms, to accommodate from 10 to 15 ambulatory adults, has produced homes that would be

suitable. Because they cannot get a written guarantee from the state, Casey said, they cannot make definite plans to buy the houses.

The situation is heightened by the fact that Island homes are sold very quickly, according to Casey. He fears that one house which seemed ideal for the program has already been sold.

Knowlton claimed that the department's own house-finding team, drawn from the central office in Albany, is in charge of securing the half-way homes. Asked about the house-finding team composed of Community Services Unit members, Knowlton said, "Their experience and help will be drawn upon." He added that the Willowbrook team can make recommendations to the state agency.

Casey claimed he never heard of the Albany team and "nobody at Willowbrook ever did, either."

## 2 HOUSES SOUGHT

"We've never even heard of any house they looked at," he added.

The department hopes to buy two houses, and negotiations with the owners will be followed by approval by the department. Necessary renovations and furnishing will then be done to allow occupancy.

After gauging the going prices for suitable homes in Staten Island, the department has estimated that it will spend from \$35,000 to \$70,000 per house.

After working on the half-way home project for over a year, members of the Community Services Unit were told recently that before anything definite can be done they must get approval for the idea from the Staten Island Mental Retardation Regional Board.

While this is a requirement under the new Unified Services Act, Casey claimed there is another delay since most of the board members are now on vacation. Casey, however, feels "sure" that approval will be given.

He said that with the complications, the two houses could not be in operation for at least six months to a year.

## TWO LEVELS

The plans call for two different houses on Staten Island. One will be for mildly or moderately retarded adults, both male and female, and will provide a six-month program for them in community living as preparation for independent living.

The other will house severely and possibly profoundly retarded ambulatory adults and will provide longer term care. It is expected to have a Willowbrook psychologist on the staff, a behavior modification program and more extensive services. Casey estimated that three employes on each shift would be needed in this house.

Establishing the Island half-way homes is one step in a program to transfer Willowbrook residents to independent living, family care homes and other state facilities.

According to Willowbrook director Dr. Miodrag Ristich, it is also a means of complying with the April federal court order demanding a ratio of one attendant per nine residents. The ratio can be achieved by either decreasing resident population or increasing staff size.