

Willowbrook: Rehabilitation on Wheels

By SANDY SATTERWHITE

"Do you think you could sleep here?"

"No, no bed."

"Do you think you could eat here?"

"No, no stove."

"You're not afraid, are you?"

"No!"

Joseph is 12, a blondhaired boy with blue eyes, tall and slim. It was his first visit to the mobile rehabilitation van from Willowbrook State School. And speech pathologist Barbara Wiener, held what appeared to be a casual conversation with the mentally retarded child.

"Let's talk about what's here," she said, pointing to a camping truck in a child's picture book. Joseph, immediately making an association with the van, looked around and asked, "Can you take me for a ride in it?"

Before his visit with Miss Wiener and occupational therapist Judy Weinmann ended, Joseph had recited part of the Pledge of Allegiance, placed smaller rings

on top of larger ones, fitted colored blocks into the openings of a toy mailbox, copied block designs and tossed a ball back and forth.

Early this week, when the specially-equipped van parked behind the Wesley Methodist Church on Richmond Av., Joseph was among several mentally and physically disabled children, now living in foster homes, who were introduced to the Mini-Rehabilitation team on its second day-long excursion into the Staten Island community.

(A social worker from Willowbrook Community Service Unit accompanied the van.)

Floria Antell, who supervises daily team activities and is director of institutional and community services for United Cerebral Palsy Assns. of New York State, says, "We're trying to upgrade the standard of care for the handicapped, and to alleviate some of the problems which have existed at Willowbrook."

During their visits, the mini-teams evaluate mentally-disturbed children and adults, educate and train parents and foster parents in patient care, establish "management plans" for family care and provide follow-up referrals to community agencies for specialized problems.

The teams also hope to reach those denied admission to already overcrowded Willowbrook, and are attempting to educate the public through films, which can be shown in the van, on the rehabilitative care they give.

Train Willowbrook Staff

But the major thrust is at the institution, where teams spend four days a week training the staff in patient care.

Miss Antell said the first two teams of seven—two physical therapists, two occupational therapists, two registered nurses and a speech pathologist—were employed by UCPA and entered Willowbrook last April. At that time, Federal Judge Orrin G. Judd's ordered that

the institution improve patient care and operations. The judge described conditions as "inhumane and shocking. Prior to the decision, UCPA had signed a contract with the state Dept. of Mental Hygiene for such teams. But after the court order, the state expanded the contract and UCPA now expects to have 15 two-member teams operating by the end of the month.

UCPA also hopes to increase van service—another custom-made vehicle with wood-paneled cabinets for toys and equipment, gold draperies for partitions and comfortable carpeting is expected within a week when visits will be made twice weekly.