

Pilot project aims at aiding handicapped at Willowbrook

By CAROLYN DeLUCA

As an alternative to institutionalizing the handicapped, directors of the Community Services Unit of Willowbrook State School and United Cerebral Palsy have initiated a pilot project on Staten Island.

The two agencies are co-sponsoring a mobile rehabilitation team that will provide training and evaluation enabling

services and agencies in the community to more readily accommodate the developmentally disabled residents.

"Our goal is to reduce the population of Willowbrook by establishing, in the community, the services we provide in the institution," Dr. Miorag Ristic, director of the facility, said.

Officials of Willowbrook and United Cerebral Palsy invited representatives of Island rehabilitation programs, hospitals, day care centers, the Board of Education, Mental Health Society and other service agencies to offer suggestions on the creation of a comprehensive coordinated network of services for the Islands disabled.

Albert Robidoux, chief of community services at Willowbrook, explained that this effort to reach out into the community is in line with the new concept of "developmental disability," as opposed to mental retardation. "The concept of growth and change permeates this new philosophy," he said.

"The best place for the disabled to achieve their potential is not in a segregated building with a fence, but in the community," he added.

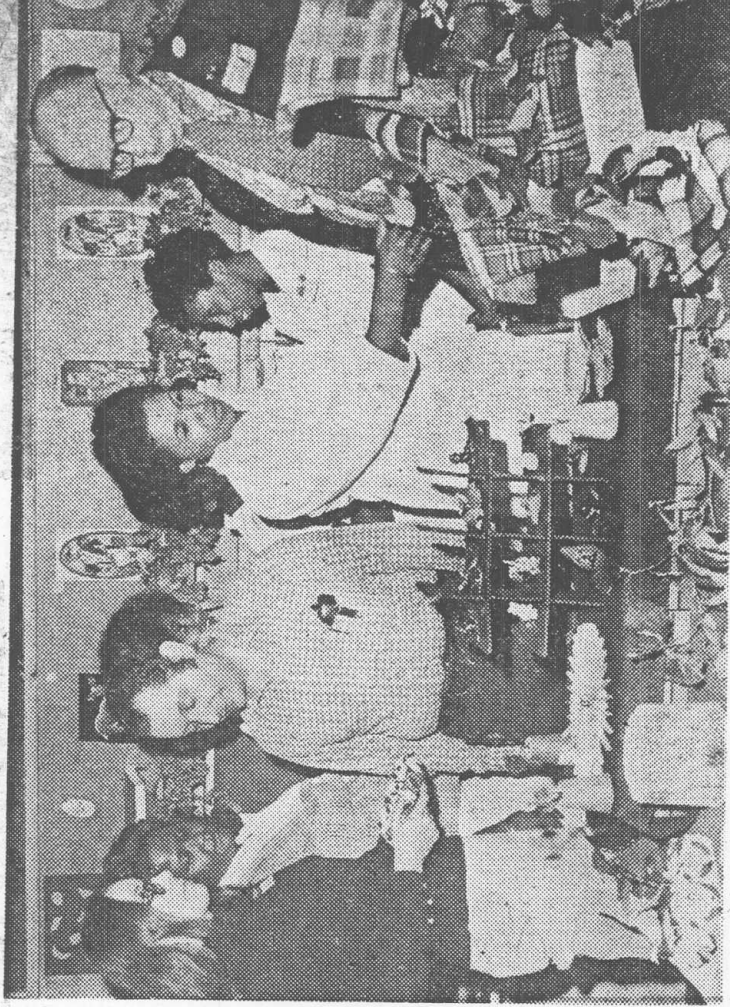
As a new "small beginning" in this new effort, a 30-member team of specialists in rehabilitation therapy will work with agencies, schools and individuals who desire training in management techniques for the developmentally disabled. This term, as defined by the government, no longer determines disability at a fixed I.Q. point, but extends the definition to include mental retardation, cerebral palsy, epilepsy and any disability resulting from the development of the individual.

These specialists will be divided into mini-teams and will emphasize instruction of the basics — feeding, positioning, and communicating with the handicapped patients.

The mini-team have been working out of one van, but they will soon acquire another to aid them in their effort to reach all of the developmentally disabled residents of the Island, Ira Fisher of the Community Services Unit said. Home visitation teams to follow up the instruction will be provided, he added.

It was suggested that this service could initially be provided to help teachers in the public schools to deal with disabled students. "We are willing to help the schools help themselves and will even assist with parental counseling," Douglas Dormann of the services unit said.

Persons and agencies wishing to participate in this project may contact the Community Services Unit of the Willowbrook State School and ask for the mini-team, Fisher said.



Handiwork on display

Miss Carol Crisson, left, an assistant occupational therapist, shows handcraft work to Irving Markowitz while Mrs. Cleophus A. Robinson, another assistant, points out items to James A. Methven during an exhibition of articles made by residents of Willowbrook State School.

S.I. Advance Photo by Frank J. Johns