

Willowbrook registration cut by 1,500 in 2 years

By CAROLYN DeLUCA

In less than two years, the population of Willowbrook State School has dropped from more than 5,000 persons to the present level of 3,348.

More than 1,500 former residents, in varying degrees of mental retardation, have been channeled into smaller institutions, homes and the community.

According to the latest records, released yesterday by Dr. Miodrag Ristich, director of the state facility, most are now under the supervision of similar institutions in other boroughs.

Dr. Ristich said that 247 former patients have been given "community status." This

means they are either living in nursing home or community residences, or have returned to their family homes.

However, they are still under the supervision of Willowbrook and are the financial responsibility of the institution.

Miss Joyce Libra, administrative assistant to the director, said that a more detailed breakdown of former residents on community status is not available at this time.

A total of 192 former residents are in the family care program, which places the patients in foster homes. Dr. Ristich said that most, but not all, of these are on the Island.

When Dr. Ristich assumed the

directorship of the mammoth institution almost two years ago, he said that it was much too large to be effective. His goal was to channel the residents into smaller institutions, closer to their homes and families.

Now, most of those who have left the institution are under the supervision of these borough facilities. Miss Libra said that when patients are shifted to these facilities, called developmental centers, it means that the responsibility for the patient has been shifted.

These developmental centers are also state institutions and like Willowbrook, they also encompass smaller community residences and foster home programs. Thus, a person registered there doesn't necessarily live in the institution, she added.

The Brooklyn Developmental Center has assumed responsibility for 380 former Willowbrook patients. There are 246 registered with the Manhattan Developmental Center, and 318 in the Queens Center and 95 with the Bronx Center.

In addition, Dr. Ristich reported that 92 persons are with the Harlem Valley Psychiatric Hospital near Poughkeepsie, 82 are in community programs upstate, 60 are in Long Island's Suffolk State School and 64 in the Kings Park Psychiatric Center, also on Long Island.