

Visitor finds little changed at Willowbrook

By NED HOUSEMAN

After making an unannounced tour of the Willowbrook Developmental Center yesterday, a representative of the New York State Association for the Retarded said residents in three buildings he visited were dirty, ill-clothed and "piled together like a litter of dogs."

Thomas McCarley made the remarks after walking through Buildings 8 and 15 and an unidentified building housing young children. Despite a reduction in the number of residents, McCarley said he has seen "no improvement" in living conditions since he began visiting the institution in January to gather information for a report to be written soon. He noted several instances of neglect, some of them apparently in violation of the law.

In none of the buildings McCarley visited yesterday was there one attendant for every nine residents, as required by a federal court ruling. In Building 8, McCarley said, the smallest ratio he observed was two attendants for 33 residents. In some wards, he said, two aides were responsible for more than 40 retarded persons.

"The reasons given was that the others were out having dinner," McCarley said. "Everytime I saw a large room, I saw two people. I can honestly say I never saw more than two attendants that were on duty," McCarley said, sitting around and

ignored their charges. They made no attempt to clean up the food residents spilled on themselves, straighten their clothing (when they wore clothing), interest them in some activity, or "sit them up, even." "They were just piled together like a litter of dogs, — that's the first thing I could think of," McCarley said. "I seldom saw an attendant stand up and do anything."

In other wards, McCarley said, residents were carefully arranged in a corner in a group of nine, as mandated by the court, and then left without supervision.

McCarley also reported that he found four residents locked in a bathroom of Building 8 without an attendant present. Two sat on a toilet, one was sprawled on the floor next to them and a third hid under the sink.

Disinfectant is not used, McCarley charged, and the buildings smell. A pile of garbage littering one bathroom floor "looked like it had been there quite a while." Quite a few toilets are without toilet paper.

Although there is an ample supply of linen in building where linen shortages were previously reported, McCarley said that many residents were without shirts or trousers. In every ward at least one of the residents went completely naked, he said.

McCarley said he saw no evidence that residents were involved in a therapeutic program in any of the buildings. "The TV was on as usual but there was no picture. In every ward, as it always is, they are doing nothing. Sitting on the floor as usual, dumped on each other," he said.

McCarley's quiet visit was overshadowed by a press conference held before television cameras yesterday on the Willowbrook grounds. Some 30 aides and parents voiced a variety of complaints, chief among them the charge that some employees have been harassed and physically attacked by other workers.

The press conference turned into a highly emotional shouting match when Dr. Miodrag Vistich, the director of Willowbrook, unexpectedly

appeared. Surrounded by the press, he quickly and firmly answered questions.

than one emotional outburst. Arguments began to break out among the crowd, causing one parent to comment: "They're like a pack of dogs. It's ridiculous."

Led by the crowd, a television crew invaded Building 7 and filmed the residents — some 40 half-dressed, retarded young men — who seemed delighted with the lights and whirring camera. A tour of the bathroom in one ward revealed roaches and feces. There was no toilet paper.

The press conference had been engineered by Charles Olson and Lawrence Newman, editors of an underground magazine, "The Aide to Willowbrook," that has been critical of the Willowbrook administration. There was some speculation the newsmen had been invited to draw attention to Willowbrook at this time to coincide with the resumption Sept. 30 of a court action which resulted in the hiring of some 600 additional employees a year and one-half ago.