

Witness says cattle prods used on retarded upstate

By SUSAN FRY

Residents of an upstate private facility for the mentally retarded, among them former residents of Willowbrook Developmental Center, were beaten, sexually abused and reprimanded with cattle prods, according to testimony heard yesterday in Brooklyn Federal Court.

Robert Rubin, a former aide at Cochection School for the Retarded, told Judge Orrin G. Judd that after he had witnessed such abuses at the school and saw a cattleprod in the director's office, he went to the American Civil Liberties Union to seek advice. The school was closed in August by the state attorney general's office.

In other testimony during the second day of hearings in which relief is being sought for residents of Willowbrook, five parents disclosed how their children's health had "deteriorated" since admittance to Willowbrook.

A Kansas City, Kan., psychologist said that of all the 20-plus facilities for the mentally retarded that he has visited, none of them "have the inadequacy so widespread and rampant" as Willowbrook.

Anthony Nocora of Glendale, L.I., said his 7-year-old daughter has become self-abusive, incapable of walking and does not recognize him anymore.

"At home and during her first year at Willowbrook (1969) where she learned to walk (she has cerebral palsy) she was active, happy and affectionate," he said.

"Now she is in a constant daze, drowsy and sleepy, tied to a chair. She's unable to close her mouth completely because of crooked teeth, so she has to eat baby food, whereas before she could chew small solid foods."

DESCRIBES SON

Mrs. Mary Kemp, whose husband is stationed with the U.S. Air Force in Arlington, Va., testified that her 9-year-old son who is blind, spastic and nearly deaf, had been able to walk with help, "pull himself up to furniture, play rhythm-band instruments and rock on a wooden horse.

"He is now unable to stand up," she said. "And his fingernails are longer than mine, with excrement under them. He scratches himself around his eyes, nose and ears. Other parents claimed their children were partially toilet-trained before entering Willowbrook but now are on the continent.

Dr. Earl C. Butterfield, professor of pediatrics at the University of Kansas Medical Center where he is also director of the Bureau of Child Research, said that during a two-day investigative visit at Willowbrook in August he learned that retarded participants in the behavior-modification unit had been in "solitary confinement" before entering the program.

"I suppose that's how their behavior had been coped with before," he suggested.

Among other things, Dr. Butterfield reported that according to a "complete and exhaustive review," residents of the "baby building complex" spent a total of three and one-half hours a week in "positive programming."

In direct examination about conditions at the Cochection School in the western Catskill region of the state, Rubin said

that cattle prods — metal sticks with electrical shocks — were used by other aides against residents as "punishment for misbehavior."

He added that the school's two owners have pleaded guilty to charges related to the alleged abuses, although he did not say if they have been sentenced. The director's case, he said, is pending.

27 TRANSFERRED

Twenty-seven residents of Willowbrook had been transferred to the upstate center after Judge Judd ruled two years ago that the state Department of Mental Hygiene reduce the size of Willowbrook.

Since then, more than 1,000 mentally retarded have been placed in other institutions, foster homes, or returned to their natural family.

The Willowbrook case is a class action against former Gov. Rockefeller and the state on behalf of the New York State Association for Retarded Children, parents and residents of the institution.

Plaintiffs are seeking relief, protection from harm and the right to habilitation and treatment rooted in the due process clause of the Constitution.

The trial continues today.