

Parents Say That Willowbrook Damages Children Kept There

By FRANK J. PRIAL

Parents of patients at the Willowbrook Developmental Center on Staten Island testified in Federal Court in Brooklyn yesterday that their children had deteriorated physically, mentally and emotionally while at the center.

Their testimony came in the second day of a hearing before Federal Judge Orrin G. Judd on a suit that seeks the transfer of the approximately 3,500 resident patients to smaller institutions or to their own or foster homes. The plaintiffs are parents and the State Association for Retarded Children.

One father said his 16-year-old son could walk and run when he entered Willowbrook 10 years ago, but now no longer could. He said the boy was tied to his bed every day and had been for more than five years. He said that the boy was a hemophiliac in addition to being severely retarded and that Willowbrook officials said the restraints were imposed to prevent the boy from injuring himself.

Under these restraints the father said, his son's legs have deteriorated to the point where he can no longer walk.

A Brooklyn man told of a son, 17, who has been at Willowbrook for 11 years. At home, he said, the boy was playful, happy and toilet-trained. "He liked clothes," the father said, "and he even picked out the clothes he would wear." Now, he continued the boy—who is severely retarded—pulls his clothes off, has forgotten his bathroom training and has developed "some form of homosexual tendencies."

On one visit, the man said, he found his son suffering from a fractured hand that had never been treated. On another occasion, he said, the boy was suffering from a fractured foot. He

said he had never been able to determine how the boy had been injured.

Sandy Derris, head speech pathologist at Willowbrook, testified that less than 50 percent of the food specified for a special feeding program he ran for young residents ever appeared on the table. Sometimes there are substitutes, he said, but more often the food simply never comes.

One mother told of bringing her son new sneakers every week because the previous pair quickly disappeared. "The only thing he hasn't lost at Willowbrook," she said, "is his life."

Earlier in the day, a Kansas specialist in mental retardation, who spent several days at Willowbrook last August, urged that the school be closed within two years.

"I don't think it can be made even a basically adequate facility," said Dr. Earl C. Butterfield, a professor of pediatrics and a director of Ralph L. Smith Center for Research in Mental Retardation and Human Development at the University of Kansas Medical Center.

"I have never seen a facility in which inadequacy was so widespread," Dr. Butterfield said.

He cited a special behavior modification unit that actually provided one attendant around-the-clock for each patient in the program. He said he found that it was not the full-time attendants who were working with the patients but students from a local college who came in for one semester.

"It is such an incredible waste of resources," he said, "to have attendants one-on-one and not use them."

Testimony of witnesses for the plaintiffs is scheduled to continue today before Judge Judd.