

Willowbrook transfers do worse at Keener

By SUSAN FRY

A specialist in mental retardation testified in Brooklyn Federal Court yesterday that a state center for the retarded on Wards Island, where 63 former residents of Willowbrook Developmental Center have been transferred, should be "closed down immediately."

Miss Linda L. Glenn, who places children from Nebraska state institutions into family-care and group homes, charged that supervision of the Keener Unit of the Manhattan Developmental Service is "less than that at Willowbrook."

She claimed that no doctors were present or available in the unit when she visited there in August. A nurse, she said, did not know who to contact in case of emergency but knew the telephone number of a hospital.

Miss Glenn was one of four witnesses, including a Great Kills grandmother who cares for three mentally retarded children in her home, to testify before Judge Orrin G. Judd in the third day of hearings in which plaintiffs seek relief for Willowbrook residents.

Mrs. Margaret Denny of 24 Osborn Ave. told the court that she has seen a "100 per cent change" in her foster children, two of whom were Willowbrook residents, since she brought them into her home.

Kenneth, 6, and Michelle, 8, were both unable to feed themselves and were not toilet-trained while at Willowbrook, she said, adding that both children learned both basic skills within two weeks.

"Now they laugh and talk," she said, explaining that neither did before. "Just looking at them gives you a feeling I don't know how to explain."

A third child, James, 4, was placed in Mrs. Denny's care upon admittance to Willowbrook. Hyperactive, introverted and barely able to talk, he is now outgoing,

talking a mile a minute and calmed down. He stopped rocking back and forth, too," she said.

The director of a Connecticut training school for the retarded testified that during two visits to Willowbrook in August he saw few examples in programs of "modern concepts in mental retardation."

Francis P. Doolittle of the Mansfield Training School was

especially critical of recreational programs and the lack of them, divulging that equipment was either inaccessible to the residents or in short supply.

"Seventy-five per cent (of Willowbrook residents) are not in v.s.v. and no recreational programs at all. No institution in the country receives so much (money) and has so little," Keener said.

A Legal Aid Society assistant testified that the bulk of recorded accidents involving injuries of varying degrees at Willowbrook occur between 5:30 a.m. and 8 a.m. when fewer staff is on wards and a doctor on call.

The assistant, Stephanie Brand, said one accident report led to the discovery that an attendant at the facility had been dismissed in August for having attempted to force two young inmates to have sexual intercourse in one of the wards.

Mrs. Brand said the incident was not recorded in the forms because Willowbrook officials claimed that neither of the two patients involved, a 12-year-old boy and a 17-year-old girl, had been physically injured.

There were 329 accidents recorded in July, she said.

Miss Glenn, who specializes in community services for the retarded, showed 10 slides comparing Willowbrook residents whose mental and physical conditions were similar

to those she worked with in community settings in Omaha.

In all instances, she said, those in homes and training centers were rehabilitated and had jobs and, in the case of children, learned basic self-help skills and were capable of intellectual, emotional and social development.

Most of the retarded were leading "close to normal" lives within a year of being placed in a community center, she said.

In discussing the Keener Unit, she said that the residents never go outside to play, although there is "enough space on the grounds for a recreation area."

When asked for suggestions as to where the Keener residents should be placed if it is closed, she responded, "I hate to say this. But if they can't find any community placement, then for their (Keener residents) own safety, it would be better to send them back to Willowbrook."

Plaintiffs in the hearing, which will continue Monday, include the New York State Association for Retarded

Children and parents of Willowbrook residents. Counsel for plaintiffs are the American Civil Liberties Union and the

Legal Aid Society. Defendants are former Gov. Rockefeller and the State Department of Mental Hygiene.