

# Willowbrook census cut 1,618 in dispersion move

By SUSAN FRY

In just over two years, the resident population at Willowbrook Developmental Center has been reduced by 1,618 and is approaching what one state official called "manageability."

Under "Project Exodus" the vast majority of the mentally retarded have been transferred to state institutions or homes in the city's five boroughs where local centers assume responsibility for them. A small group are now in the jurisdiction of state-related centers on Long Island, Broome County and New Jersey.

In addition to reducing the size of Willowbrook which a federal district court judge ordered two years ago, the purpose of the Exodus program

is to relocate Willowbrook residents in areas close to their homes.

In April of 1972 Willowbrook's resident population totaled 4,691 and by Sept. 20 the census was 3,073.

On Staten Island approximately 75 residents have been placed on community status which means they are residing with natural parents or legal guardians. Another 207 have moved in with foster families; six are in Clove Lakes Nursing Home and two in Hylan Manor Home for Adults.

In every case, however, Willowbrook is responsible for providing programs and medical services. Although

placed in homes with families or nursing homes in other boroughs, about 145 former Willowbrook residents are "on the books" of Willowbrook and "followed by" the institution.

Approximately 50 are on waiting lists for Staten Island family care — or foster home — referrals.

In Brooklyn, 368 mentally retarded have been placed in Kings County State School; 60 in the Williamsburg Residential and Training Center; 15 in foster homes and one in Guild Bay Ridge Hostel. One hundred are being considered for placement. All 444 now in Brooklyn are followed by that borough's Developmental Services.

Now in the care of the Bronx Developmental Service, 104

Willowbrook residents have been transferred to that borough. Forty-three are with natural parents or legal guardians; 17 with foster parents; 25 are in the Senator Convalescent Center in Atlantic City, N.J., but in the care of the Bronx; four in the Bruckner Nursing Home and 40 in the private Castle Hill Manor. Approximately six are under consideration for placement into the Bronx.

Three hundred and two mentally retarded have been moved to three units — Corona, Glenn Oaks and Howard Park — of Queens (Bernard E. Fineson) Developmental Center. One is with a natural family and 21 in foster homes. About 40 are on waiting lists.

Former Willowbrook residents (Continued on Page 4)

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whose families, in most cases, are in Nassau or Suffolk Counties — totaling 141 — have also been transferred to the Kings Park Developmental Center, 81, or to Suffolk State School, 60. Twenty are under consideration for referrals.

Approximately 200 people have been moved to the care of the Manhattan Developmental Service, although the exact breakdown as to where they are residing as of Sept. 20 was not available last week when the Advance census study is completed.

Ninety-seven mentally retarded are in family care or foster homes in Broome County and are the responsibility of the county's Community Services.

Planned projections for next year include the transfer of approximately 800 from Willowbrook which would take the resident population below its rated capacity of 3,500.

The director of the Parent Advocacy Project (of the state Department of Mental Hygiene) contends that the significant reduction would bring Willowbrook to a "manageable level."

"However, we can't go after that goal in isolation without designing standards in relation to that goal," Mrs. Mary Reichsman said, referring to the state's lack of small community-based programs.

She conceded that in some cases a new living situation, out of Willowbrook, has not always been in the best or ideal interests of the mentally retarded.

"Reducing the size of Willowbrooks are merely temporary expedients. Bigness in itself is a bad thing since a large group of disabled persons has a paralyzing effect on observers and patients themselves. The observer's view of the mentally retarded

becomes eschewed. (TA) The disabled person can not develop a clear sense of self in large settings (like Willowbrook). However, a disabled person in a normal setting can experience individuality and be seen, from the public, as an individual."

Mrs. Reichsman added that Project placements have not been "optimal" and that mental health experts are a long way from knowing what is best for the mentally retarded. An additional problem she said is dispelling the fears of a community in which the retarded should be part.

"Our society has not wanted to see people who don't look like us. However, we are changing somewhat, maturing enough to see more toleration of deviance."

Long range plans for Willowbrook include reorganizing it into a residential

care center for Staten Islanders who require in-patient services, Mrs. Reichsman said. In addition, she said, the state would like to use it for respite care where the mentally retarded at home could reside for short periods of time, for example during family emergencies.