

## It's your opinion

### A positive side of Willowbrook

I sent the following letter to Mrs. Watkins, head nurse at Building 14 at Willowbrook:

"I am writing this letter to reassure the members of the staff of Building 14 who have indicated distress over our testimony at the trial concerning Willowbrook State School.

When originally approached by the lawyers for the Justice Department we were quite apprehensive, primarily because of the repercussions that might affect the people who worked so closely with our son, Kevin. We were faced with a very difficult decision, especially when told that very few parents would agree to testify because they were afraid.

"On the other hand was the obvious need for more change and a better environment for both the children and the people who work with them. The decision to testify was made because our conscience would not let us refuse. Our testimony was a criticism of the system that allows the terrible reputation of Willowbrook to be created. We had to hope that the staff would understand that we were attacking the government bureaucracy of the Department of Mental Hygiene and the State of New York.

"We personally feel that the majority of the people who work at Willowbrook have to be dedicated, compassionate, and concerned in order to continue there against such difficult and discouraging working conditions. While testifying at the trial the lawyer asked about positive things that we have witnessed. I immediately told the court how Kevin had recently been taught to feed himself, how impressed we were by this accomplishment, and that we had immediately written a note to commend those who had been responsible. We have seen improvements recently, but we would be dishonest if we denied that we wanted more, not only for our child, but for ALL who reside and work there.

"We feel so helpless because there seems to be so little that we can do. That is probably one of the reasons that we agreed to testify. If through our act we can show a need for a better Willowbrook, then our purpose was worthwhile. We did not want to hurt, but to HELP. Please rest assured that we would do anything to further that aim.

"To all who try so hard: please accept our heartfelt thanks. If we can ever do anything to support you, please let us know. May God provide all of us with the strength and faith to carry on.

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