

Editorial page It's your opinion

Retarded need

24-hour care

In reference to Stuart Feld's front page article on Willowbrook Developmental Center dated Nov. 18, I wish to take exception to paragraph seven. "...that an attendant in Ward 29 died three weeks ago of a heroin overdose while on duty". This statement is false and unfair to our residents, their parents and our staff. If you and your colleagues are attempting to arouse public indignation then you have succeeded. However, if you and your colleagues are looking for sensationalism, I can provide you with all the sensational material you need to fill your column.

Building 29 has earned a reputation of being one of the most, if not the most difficult building in the institution to work in. All of our residents are profoundly retarded (I.Q. less than 20) with multiple physical handicaps. They are so developmentally disabled that every child functions at the level of a six-eight month old baby, although the range age is eight years to 38 years old and some weigh over 100 lbs.

Every child must be bathed, fed, loved, recreated and protected from harm just as a new born. This service must be provided 24 hours a day, seven days a week without fail. Our children are non-verbal, non-ambulatory human beings who have the same basic needs as you.

If you and your paper want sensationalism, consider the residents who in their teenage years have learned to sit for the first time and hold their heads up. Come and see a 13 year old resident who has recently taken his first few steps alone. Investigate our feeding program in which 27 residents learned to hold a spoon and began to feed themselves. Look into the fact that many

of our residents showed absolutely no awareness of their surroundings two years ago but now smile when an employee strokes their cheek. This is sensational! This is fact, not a story but fact. These facts did not just happen, it took the efforts of many devoted people who care, who see our children as people, not as freaks or uglies. These are the facts that the community should be made aware of.

Yes, we have our problems, i.e. staffing, clothing and equipment shortages, to name a few. Yes, we are frustrated. What has your paper or the community done to help us? Report erroneous news? Would a member of the community volunteer to come in and help us feed and dress 133 "new born" adults after having read your report? Our children have become pawns and we deeply resent this fact. Our success or failures may very well have been the best we could do under existing circumstances. Most of our employees are dedicated hard working family people who have devoted many years to the care of the mentally retarded. Why should they be repeatedly demoralized?

I suggest that your paper begin to educate the community as to what mental retardation is and how it affects a family, a neighborhood and community. Considering the fact that three per cent of the population is afflicted and that mental retardation knows no barriers of race or social class, we are all open to its tragic effects.

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