

# Willowbrook Sending Patients of All Ages to 100 Staten Island Homes

By FRANK J. PRIAL

Margaret Denny's 17th child arrived a few weeks ago at the Denny's Staten Island home. Mrs. Denny, who is 50, insists that there could very well be more.

Mrs. Denny is a foster parent to children from the Willowbrook Developmental Center, the state institution for the retarded near her home, which is in the Great Kills section. The Denny's are among 100 Staten Island families caring for retarded patients of all ages who might otherwise be confined at Willowbrook.

"I got the idea about the time all that terrible stuff about Willowbrook was in the papers and on television," Mrs. Denny said the other day. "My own were grown and gone and I had time on my hands."

Rearing foster children was nothing new to her—she is a widowed mother of five who married a widower with five. Mr. Denny is a foreman and driver on United Van Lines. Mrs. Denny has also raised three orphans from the Mount Loretto Home, a Roman Catholic institution, also on Staten Island.

All 13 of those children are married now and have produced 12 grandchildren for the Denny's.

"But the place didn't seem right without kids," Mrs. Denny recalled, and last January, Jamie arrived at the Denny home. He was 4 years old then and celebrated his 5th birthday on Dec. 5. Kenny, who was 6 in October, arrived in July. Michele, who is 8, arrived in September, and Lisa, 10, arrived the day before Thanksgiving.

**Real Parents 'Thrilled'**

"We are just crazy about Mrs. Denny," said Mary Ann Rogers, the Willowbrook social worker who is the state's liaison agent with the Denny family and their foster children. "What's more, the children's real parents are thrilled with the way they have progressed under her care."

Jamie is the only one of Mrs. Denny's foster children who is not a mongoloid. He talks volubly, dresses and feeds himself and has grown two inches under Margaret Denny's care.

When Kenny first began to eat at the Denny home, he would push his face in the bowl and cover his plate with his hands. Because no one had ever shown him how, he could barely walk.

"Now he plays outdoors with the neighbors' children, feeds and dresses himself and is learning to talk," Mrs. Denny said. "When his true parents came here, they were flabbergasted. I think it was the first time they had kissed him in a long time."

Michele, has learned to help dress the younger children and dry the dishes.

The effectiveness of foster care for the mentally ill was cited earlier this fall in a trial that is to resume in Federal Court in Brooklyn next week. In the case, the parents of some Willowbrook children are seeking to have the institution last September, a succession of specialists in the care of the mentally ill testified to the remarkable results achieved by transferring patients from mental hospitals to private homes and to small residential centers with home-like atmospheres.

However, Albert Robidoux, director of Community Services at Willowbrook said, "one problem was, finding proper residential situations in the boroughs where almost every one lives in an apartment."

Most new foster parents—ponderance of one-family and two-family houses, has been found particularly well-suited for the community residence program.

At present, 203 Willowbrook patients are living with families on Staten Island. They range from young children to adults in their 70's. Most of the patients have been placed since the institution's Community Services program began two years ago, but Willowbrook has had some form of residential program for more than 15 years.

or caretaker families, as Willowbrook people prefer to call them—hear of the program involved. Mrs. Denny has brought four friends into the program, including a woman who had been living alone and who now cares for two retarded girls in wheel chairs.

A foster parent receives \$280 a month for each patient. Of that money, \$17 must go to the patient for personal needs. Willowbrook can provide extra money for clothes in some cases, but the foster parents, and occasionally the natural parents, usually provide what is needed.

Some adult patients also receive money from Social Security or the Veterans Administration. By law, \$20 of any such payments each month must be kept in an account at Willowbrook.

Prospective foster parents face private and group interviews. These are followed by a written application and home visits by the Community Services staff.

If the prospective foster parents are acceptable, they are issued a license for family care.

Before the patient is sent to the family, both the prospective foster parents and the natural parents are called in. The patient then spends two weekends with prospective foster parents. If the arrangement is a success, the patient can move in almost immediately.

Willowbrook prefers to have no more than four residents with any one foster family, although two Staten Island families have five.

"The law permits up to 15," Mr. Robidoux said, "but that kind of situation tends to be too much like the institution the patient just left."

In many arrangements, however, all sides benefit. As Mrs. Denny put it:

"You watch them all dressed up, waiting outside for the school bus, and believe me it gives you a feeling you just can't explain."



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Margaret Denny taking a walk last month with Lisa, 10, Michele, 8, Kenny, 6, and Jamie, 5

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