

Probe goes on into Rivera's One-to-One

By JOHN E. HURLEY

The One-to-One organization, founded two-and-a-half years ago following revelations of poor conditions at Willowbrook Development Center, is currently under investigation by the office of State Attorney General Louis Lefkowitz.

A spokesman from the attorney general's office declined to give any details but said that findings may be available early this month.

The investigation is believed to stem from a dispute within One-to-One that resulted in the resignation of the executive director and four working staff members in early November. The One-to-One office at 9 West 57th St. in Manhattan was subsequently shut down, and the day-to-day operation is currently being run by acting executive director Patrick Hanson and a secretary in a small corner of Geraldo Rivera's ABC office at Broadway and 64th St., Manhattan.

A New York Times article dated Nov. 8 had reported a state investigation and added that no criminal allegations had been made. A Times story the following day, Nov. 9, had quoted Geraldo Rivera, chairman of the board of One-to-One, as denying that any funds had been misspent and declaring One-to-One's books open to anyone who wished to see them. Rivera had also been quoted as conceding that the organization was experiencing "growing pains."

However, in an interview on Dec. 11, acting executive director Hanson had denied that any investigation was continuing and he had said that "the whole thing was a big mistake."

"Geraldo called Lefkowitz and the Times and got it

straightened out," Hanson said.

This was disputed by the spokesman from the state attorney general's office, who said the investigation was still in progress and had been for several months.

It was on Aug. 30, 1972, that the first busloads of retarded children began emptying into the Central Park Sheep Meadow for the first One-to-One Festival. Twenty-three busloads of children and adults came that day from both Willowbrook and other state institutions to participate in a new concept: One volunteer for every retarded person.

There were games, arts and crafts, dancing, refreshments, and later that evening, a benefit concert at Madison Square Garden headlined by John Lennon and Stevie Wonder.

Geraldo Rivera, whose controversial coverage of the Willowbrook institution had energized the One-to-One movement, was organizer and emcee.

Nine months later, in June 1973, the 2nd annual Sheep Meadow festival was staged, followed by another benefit concert that evening. John Denver, Judy Collins and Bill Withers starred. Don Imus emceed, and Geraldo Rivera was host.

The evening following the 2nd festival and concert, a telethon was aired on channel 9.

Another major telethon was conducted in June 1974 and a number of other smaller fund-raising activities have been staged.

Rivera, his One-to-One organizers and the hundreds of volunteers from other organizations hoped to make a significant contribution to the level of retarded care in the state by raising money to aid the creation of halfway homes

as an alternative to the large mental institution.

Karla Munger, the former executive director who resigned with four staff members in early November, recently defended the concept and progress of One-to-One and stressed that the funds had been tightly controlled.

However, she added that she felt the effectiveness of the organization was being hampered by a board of directors hand-picked by Rivera, many of whom she claimed know little about the problems of the retarded.

The eleven-member board, chaired by Rivera, includes assemblyman Andrew Stein (D-Man), Dr. Judy Ann Denson-Gerber, Contessa Diane Agostini and Francine Lefrak.

"The board had gotten into a lot of infighting and bickering," Munger said. "They seemed more preoccupied with fund-raising than with giving out the money to provide help for these people."

All grants or loans by One-to-One are first screened by the executive director and then presented for approval to the board of directors. (Grants do not require repayment, and loans must usually be repaid only upon reimbursement by the state.)

Munger claims that her proposals for grants for many projects were either being ignored or rejected out-of-hand at board meetings.

"Those people meet when they feel like it," Munger said. "And when they do meet, they're just a rubber stamp for Geraldo."

In denying these charges, Hanson, a former staffer from Rivera's "Goodnight America" show, said that the opposite was true — that Munger simply wasn't presenting any proposals for the board to act on. (This charge was later la-