

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 headlining 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 repayed 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-

beled as "absurd" by Munger.) But Hanson conceded in the Dec. 11 interview that the organization was going through a "period of transition."

Figures obtained from Hanson and One-to-One accountant Daniel O. Pepper reveal that the organization currently has over \$400,000 in unallocated funds. However, Pepper said that proposals for over \$300,000 in aid are currently "under consideration."

On the other hand, Pepper and Hanson released figures claiming that One-to-One has either granted or loaned over \$660,000 to various organizations since December 1972. The list includes names like Catholic Charities, the Association for the Help of Retarded Children, the Lutheran Community Services, and others.

Figures on the total amount the organization has grossed through its various fund-raising benefits were unavailable, but Pepper said he felt that Munger's estimate of \$1.8 million gross was "a bit high."

The grants and loans are provided as start-up funds for organizations wishing to build halfway homes for the retarded.

A Department of Mental Hygiene program provides funds for 50 per cent of maintenance costs for new halfway homes, and in many cases, supplemental security income payments to halfway home residents can cover the remaining costs.

However, many of the organizations require seed money for the acquisition of mortgages, furniture and other essentials.

Conversations recently with officials at halfway homes throughout the metropolitan area have confirmed that grants or loans from One-to-One were crucial in the opening of at least six such facilities. Several more homes will be opening within the next several months with One-to-One aid.

However, though much of the money has already yielded concrete results, some has not.

In December 1972, the Willowbrook chapter of the

Parents Benevolent Association received a grant of \$62,500 from One-to-One for the creation of a halfway home. The money is still in a special trust fund.

Another grant of \$62,500 was made in December, 1972 to the Working Organization for Retarded Children in Queens, but work has yet to begin on a home there. An official of the Queens organization pointed to red tape from the Department of Mental Hygiene as the principal cause of the delay.

Officials from the Willowbrook chapter of the Parents Benevolent Society that were contacted said they are currently in the process of locating a site for the hostel and setting up a corporation to deal with that and other funds.

Jerry Gavin, former president of the chapter, and Anthony Pinto, the current president, admitted that the group had experienced some difficulty in deciding how the money would be used, but both also defended the delay.

"There was never any feeling that the money had to be used right away," Gavin said. "We were invited to be part of this thing, and the money was a windfall."

Pinto, who was also president of the chapter when the grant was made, pointed to community opposition to those halfway homes already existing or proposed as one reason for the go-slow attitude. He added that a hostel would only alleviate living conditions for about 10 residents, whereas his society must be concerned with the entire Willowbrook population.

"We've spent thousands of dollars out of our own pockets on many Willowbrook projects," Pinto said. "I can't knock myself out just to get 10 people out of there."

Both Pinto and Dr. Albert Robidoux, director of community services at Willowbrook, expressed what seems to be a general feeling at the institution: that while Rivera's coverage focused some needed attention on conditions there, his organization has done little toward helping the residents themselves.

Dr. Miodrag Ristich, the

former director at Willowbrook who had cited Rivera's coverage as being unique in its unfairness in a recent interview, says that the concerts billed as events "To Free the Children of Willowbrook" may have been misleading to many.

The policy that has been used in many hostels has been to take at least half of the residents from the various state institutions and the other half from the community.

A check with the existing One-to-One funded hostels reveals that only about 25 former Willowbrook residents are now in such homes.

However, less easy to measure is One-to-One's possible impact on the State Department of Mental Hygiene's increasing willingness to accept the halfway house concept.

Since the first One-to-One festival, the population of Willowbrook has been cut nearly in half under Project Exodus, and the recently announced resignation of Dr. Allen Miller as head of the department may mean even more halfway homes for institutionalized patients.

The following is a list and brief description of the halfway homes that have opened with One-to-One assistance:

Garfield Manor, Brooklyn. Opened in March 1973 under the auspices of Catholic Charities of Brooklyn, it houses 10 moderately to severely retarded adults, eight of whom are former Willowbrook residents.

Dawson Manor, Queens. Opened in September, 1973 by Catholic Charities, it houses 13 moderately to severely retarded adults from 18 to 50 years of age. A "majority" of the residents were once Willowbrook patients according to house manager Tom Bura. One-to-One funds were used to acquire mortgages on both these homes.

Posner House, St. Albans, Queens. Opened in April 1974 by the Association for the Advancement of Blind Children, it houses 10 retarded girls, nine of whom are blind. An association spokesman said that five are former Willowbrook patients.

New Hope Center, Brooklyn. Opened in September, 1974, it houses 11 moderately to severely retarded children from 6 1/2 to 11 years of age. A Lutheran Community Services spokesman said that one child is a former Willowbrook resident.

Community Residence, Yonkers. Opened in July 1974 by Association for the Help of Retarded Children - Westchester, it houses 13 moderately to severely retarded adults. A One-to-One loan helped pay for the furniture. An association spokesman said one resident is a former Willowbrook patient.

Christopher House, Rockville Center. Opened June 1974 by Catholic Charities of Rockville Center, it houses eight moderately retarded adults who are employed during the day at an AHRC shelter workshop. Located in a former convent and staffed by the Dominican Sisters, it was opened with the help of One-to-One funds that were used to buy the furniture. One resident is a former Willowbrook patient.