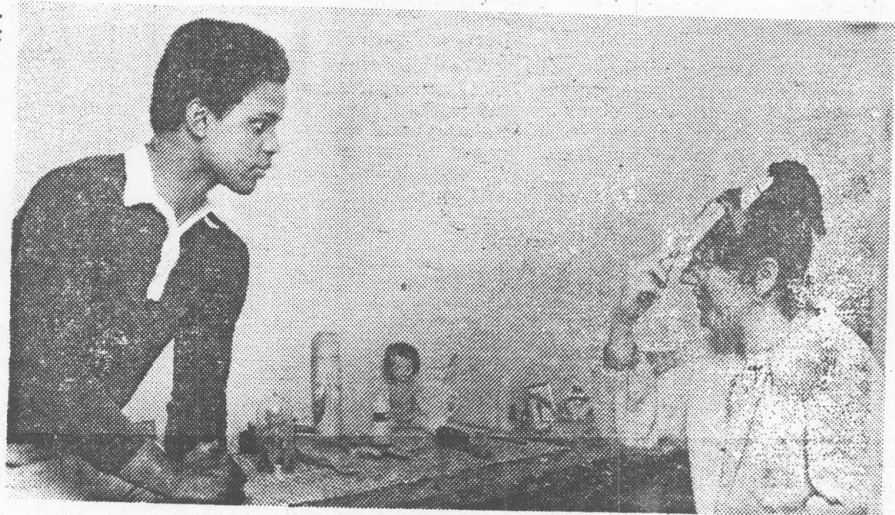




At Manhattan Development Center, unit chief Joseph Moscowitz (second right) chats with resident as Pat Bertrand, director of community services (standing), shares chuckle with another resident. After day's work chat two residents (→) chat in homey atmosphere.



News photo by Vincent Riehl

42 mildly retarded residents to live in their own apartments, traveling to and from jobs or workshops each day alone, has resulted in 20 being discharged permanently from state care. The other 22 are living in apartments, but with continuing supervision.

Robidoux estimates that at least 80 Staten Islanders and between 800 and 900 residents of other boroughs now institutionalized at Willowbrook are capable of semi-independent living in a halfway house right now. But there is nowhere for them to go.

State officials said there are also hundreds of Willowbrook residents, and retarded people in other large state institutions outside the city, who are not capable of functioning in a halfway house, but could profit from being closer to their home communities nonetheless.

Kenneth LaCorte, 31, now lives with 125 other retarded people at Sheridan Unit of Manhattan Developmental Center, 75 Morton St. He used to live at Willowbrook, with close to 3,000 others.

"We can't believe the change in him," said his mother, Sue LaCorte. "We can visit him every day, and we take him home every weekend. He just loves to come home, and now he attends occupational therapy at a training center on E. Fifth St., so he sees a bit more of the world every day. I can tend to his laundry and make sure he doesn't look like he belongs in an institution. He doesn't look so fearful and shy as he did at Willowbrook."

Mrs. LaCorte added that the community around Sheridan has come to accept its retarded neighbors and sees that they are "human beings, not freaks."

"Normal children play with these children, they go to church and on picnics," she said. "This can only happen when they are in the community, instead of out in the woods somewhere."