

# It's your opinion

## Willowbrook: Dismantle it!

In response to Florence Brytcuk's letter published July 26, I can only reply that it would be criminal not to make every effort possible to dismantle Willowbrook Developmental Center and the sooner, the better!

One cannot dispute her point that the physical grounds are attractive with large trees, merry-go-rounds and swimming pools. However, she neglects to mention the condition of the wards, the filth and overcrowded conditions these children must function in for the major portion of each day of the year.

I must question why Ms. Brytcuk views the integration of the developmentally disabled population into the community as a cruel gesture. With proper guidance, training and supervision, these individuals can live and function happily in the community. Should they be denied the same benefits as "normal" children? Life in a group home would provide them with a more fulfilling existence, with a sense of family, sharing, caring and responsibility.

I personally do not feel that any individual, regardless of sex, would assume the position of director of the center unless he had a strong personal commitment to the care and education of the developmentally disabled. Male or female is irrelevant; dedication, devotion and good hard work is what is takes!

In conclusion I should like to recommend that Ms. Brytcuk and other members of the Staten Island community who share her views to carefully read her local newspaper and examine both sides of the coin. The view that this dismantling of Willowbrook will be cruel to the residents is ludicrous. De-institutionalization will require much forethought and planning; however, all individuals deserve a place in the community.

Many providers as well as consumers of service to the developmentally disabled population in the Staten Island community are investing a major effort to accomplish these goals. A recent grant proposal to provide comprehensive transportation services for these individuals has been approved. This is certainly one step in the direction of making their integration more feasible. These community residents are giving of themselves, they are both male and female, because they all have a heart. Their gender does not determine its size.

What do you fear, Ms. Brytcuk?

DIANE D. CUNNINGHAM,  
Meiers Corners

## Family's love best of all

This is in response to Florence E. Brytcuk whose letter appeared in the Advance July 26.

The "unfortunate children" that she refers to would much prefer a homelife atmosphere to Willowbrook. It is most unfortunate that she does not comprehend that sitting under a shade tree in the summertime, riding on a merry-go-round, taking a shower or swimming in a swimming pool does not satisfy a human being as does the daily love of living with a family or in as close to a family situation as possible.

We, as a concerned and interested council, agree that the need for a more realistically sized institution is imperative. We will continue to strive for community placement for citizens of Willowbrook who are being adequately prepared for community living.

EMMA COLEMAN,  
West Brighton  
(Mrs. Coleman is vice-chairman of the Staten Island Regional Retardation and Disabilities Council.)

## Home living seen better

I was amazed at Florence Brytcuk's letter; I don't think I have ever encountered anyone who has visited Willowbrook Developmental Center and said that the residents should remain there. I strongly suspect that the author has never been inside a resident building.

Agreed that the "cover" of Willowbrook Developmental Center is nice to look at (trees, etc.) but if one turns the cover, the content is a disgrace.

The residents of Willowbrook Developmental Center will leave and reside in houses with a yard, garage, etc., just like "normal people." The developmentally disabled have been forgotten for too long and it's about time that they were allowed the right to work, travel, socialize, etc. in the community of their choice.

I realize that some members of the Staten Island community feel as Ms. Brytcuk does, but there are a great many more who feel that the residents of Willowbrook Developmental Center should reside in the community.

In closing, may I say that I don't think that women have "more heart" than men; that the residents will leave Willowbrook Developmental Center; and finally, that Willowbrook Developmental Center will be dismantled.

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Grymes Hill  
(The writer is assistant administrator of the Staten Island Center for Developmental Disabilities, a division of the Staten Island Mental Health Society).