

# Willowbrook transfers worse off than before

By ROBERT MIRALDI

More than 1,300 persons who have been transferred from Willowbrook Developmental Center to other state facilities are living under conditions worse than those at the Staten Island center for the retarded, the Willowbrook Review Panel has charged.

Furthermore, the panel says in a 166-page report, the 12 metropolitan area centers where ex-Willowbrook residents live do not comply with federal guidelines set over a year ago and agreed to by the state Department of Mental Hygiene.

Willowbrook observers have long suspected that facilities to which Willowbrook residents have been dispersed over the past four years were worse than the 2,600-bed Island center and certainly in non-compliance with the Willowbrook Consent Decree.

But the report by the court-appointed Review Panel is the first documentation of the conditions, detailing a lack of privacy, severe understaffing, lack of appropriate programs and a philosophical lack of understanding by state employes about the consent decree, which outlines radical changes for state centers.

The report gives the Review Panel and attorneys for parents' groups more ammunition for the fall hearings in U.S. District Court during which attorneys are expected to seek contempt citations against top state officials for not implementing the consent decree.

The panel has already documented non-compliance at Willowbrook and in the Department of Mental Hygiene's community placement effort, which fell

about 70 placements short of the court-ordered minimum of 200.

A spokesman for the panel said yesterday that the "evidence of the audit points to a lack of knowledge on the part of the management and staff of the (surveyed) facilities not only of the specific requirements of the (Willowbrook) consent judgment, but of the philosophy that underlies the judgment."

The spokesman emphasized that the the consent decree is "based on the recognition that retarded persons, regardless of the degree of handicapping conditions, are capable of physical, intellectual, emotional and social growth."

"It is the failure of the Department of Mental Hygiene," the spokesman said, "that after more than a year these underlying assumptions, as well as the requirements of the decree, are not implemented or even understood at facilities" where ex-Willowbrook residents now live.

Thomas A. Coughlin, Department of Mental Hygiene deputy commissioner responsible for the implementation of the consent decree, had no comment on the panel's report, an aide to Coughlin said yesterday from his Albany office.

The decree was signed by Gov. Carey in April 1975 after a three-year battle in federal court between the Department of Mental Hygiene and parent groups. When the court suit began March 17, 1972, there were 5,341 residents at Willowbrook.

"Operation Exodus" at Willowbrook in 1972 began the transfer of 1,300 resi-

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