

# 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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dents to facilities in Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens and Suffolk, Wassaic and Westchester Counties. Those residents were to receive the benefits of the consent decree.

As the Review Panel report points out, however, none of the Willowbrook-related facilities comply. "Far too many sleeping areas still consist of large open wards with little or no individual furniture or decorations," the report says.

"Even worse are the bathroom areas, where privacy is typically not provided and the necessary supplies (toilet tissue, soap, towels) are not readily available," the report adds.

The panel's most "disturbing" findings concerned staffing deficits (as high as 60 per cent in some facilities), and the lack of six hours of daily programming. About programming the panel found that:

¶ Five-hundred ex-Willowbrook residents need toilet training; only 108 are in toilet-training programs.

¶ Four-hundred and fourteen ex-residents are not self-feeders, but only 138 are in self-feeding programs.

¶ Of 395 non-ambulatory ex-residents, only 139 are receiving physical therapy services.

¶ Of 706 non-verbal ex-Willowbrook residents, 426 are receiving speech therapy services.

Furthermore, the panel auditors found inappropriate age groupings in 11 of 12 facilities surveyed; lack of privacy in all but one facility; inappropriate clothing, and unsuitable policy and procedure manuals.

Perhaps the worst center audited by the panel was the Gouverneur Service Center in Manhattan where, the report says, none of the 164 ex-Willowbrook residents have required development plans; where only three residents are

receiving six hours of programming; where all residents needs toilet training but where none are receiving it, and where only 26 of 96 needy residents are receiving physical therapy.

At the Keener Service Center in Manhattan, the panel found a document which said that "residents being toilet trained are still eating their meals in the lavatory."

At the Howard Park Unit of Queens Developmental Center, the panel found, a policies and procedures manual contains nothing more than the language in the Willowbrook Consent Decree. "This document merely parrots the language without such a policy in evidence," the report says.

The report cites eight examples at Howard Park where staff noted that the consent decree could not be implemented because the retarded population makes it "both unrealistic and impractical."

Because of the "severity of the residents' disability, the use of toothpaste and toothbrushes are impractical," says one Howard Park manual.