

It's your opinion

Parent defends Keener program

I am writing this letter in response to an article which appeared in the Sept. 8 issue of your newspaper concerning a report of the Willowbrook Review Panel. I feel that you have irresponsibly engaged in inaccurate journalism by exaggerating issues which were raised by the panel.

Specifically, the statement that "residents being toilet trained are still eating their meals in the lavatory" at Keener has been taken entirely out of context. This statement refers to three residents of Keener who are participating in an intensive behavior modification program which has been successful in toilet training residents who while in Willowbrook for years were never toilet trained. As part of this program their lunch is served in an area adjacent to the lavatory to provide continuity in their training.

This program has been based on the work of Dr. Nathan Azrin who has reported the positive effects of the program in his book "Toilet Training the Retarded." It should also be noted that this program was reviewed by the Professional Advisory Board of the Willowbrook Review Panel which stated its report with respect to Keener that "behavior modification programs are carefully documented using recognized baseline information, task analysis, and reinforcement schedules, etc."

We commend your concern for our children and other residents of Willowbrook and New York State DMH-related facilities for the mentally retarded. However, in all fairness, we must support honest efforts on the part of Keener to try to provide intensive programming. Incomplete coverage of honest attempts at programming can only serve as a detriment to just claims of neglect and abuse which need to be documented and corrected.

Very pertinent is the fact that several inspection teams have made intense studies of the programming at Keener. These teams consisted of some of the outstanding experts in the field of mental retardation. Reports were made to the Willowbrook Review Panel and to the Department of Mental Hygiene regional director unanimously acclaiming the programming at Keener along with the staff attitude and staff morale. In every area of education and training Keener was judged to be far better than what had transpired at Willowbrook.

As very deeply concerned parents, we deplore the unsalutary effect your article has had on staff morale and the increasing difficulty such publicity engenders in attracting desirable personnel.

MATTHEW C. RUBY,

Manhattan

(The writer is chairman of the Keener Parents Association.)