

Proud of Residential Center for Retardates

By MARY ENGELS

Sixteen months ago, the Nina Eaton Residential Center for mental retardates opened in South Beach with great expectations. According to the center's director, Fred Stein, and some members of his staff last week, "the center is more than fulfilling its goal."

In his office, Stein explained, "It began as an experiment to show we could take a small group, 49 of the worst cases at Willowbrook, severely and profoundly retarded residents, from ages 18 and up, and be able to give them full rehabilitative services in a residential background as opposed to being institutionalized."

Proud of Results

"Our ultimate goal has been to allow each individual to work towards his or her fullest potential and we have striven to give each the most normal environment possible."

The proof is in the results to which Stein and his staff proudly point. Stein said, "The number of ambulatory residents was zero back in June 75. Today

13 of our residents are ambulatory. None was toilet trained then. Today 27 are. Those in a self-feeding program were also zero in 1975 but today seven can feed themselves."

"Most important," added the director, "is that three of our residents have gone to live elsewhere in the borough of their origin because they successfully, to the best of their ability, can care for themselves."

The center, which is run under the auspices of the United Cerebral Palsy of New York State, Inc., is located in Building D on the grounds of the South Beach Psychiatric Center.

Forde's Idea

Floria Antell, director of institutional community services for UCP, said that it was while working at Willowbrook four years ago in a small program similar to the one now at Eaton that the idea for the residential center was conceived by the then acting Willowbrook director, James Forde.

"He approached us with the idea and fortunately we were able to get the space at South Beach through his help and the N.Y. State Department of Mental Hygiene," Miss Antell said.

Rooms for the residents are colorful

and homelike and are in a two-story building.

"It certainly beats the dorm living they had at Willowbrook," said Miss Antell.

How the residents react to their environment has also apparently changed their outlook on life for the better, according to the staff.

"Some of the residents use to recoil when you came near them at Willowbrook. Here they appreciate what everyone is doing to help them and the good old tender loving care certainly makes a difference in their attitudes," one staff member said.

Stein praised the staff members who he said, have given more than their own working time to help out.

"One of our therapy aides recently bought a television set as a Christmas present for the two residents she works with," he said.

Good Grooming

Another therapy aide, Carmen Scifo, recently suggested a proposal for good grooming under the activities of daily living program, that was not accepted but apparently seemed to be working out beautifully.

We watched as three residents were



Barbara Grant (standing, left) works with center residents.

working on combing out and setting a manikin's hair. It looked like a session in a beauty training course with everybody obviously enjoying their work.

Miss Scifo, who had been a hairdresser, explained. "I wanted them to see what the outside world is all about and make them feel pretty and glamorous too," as she showed them how to comb and style the hair.

In another area of the center, Jim Allocco, recreational therapist, and Vicki Chin, occupational therapist, were working with a resident with a spastic condition. They had a basketball they were tossing into her hand.

Idea Behind Exercise

"The idea," according to Allocco, "was to get the girl to keep her head in line. It tends to tilt backwards," he explained, as the resident came forward to catch the ball.

Allocco praised the programs at the center and said "There's no doubt but in the short time we've been here they have come a long way."

Lou Vaiano, another therapy aide who was teaching recreational and physical therapy to some of the young male residents seconded Allocco's thinking.

"By teaching them self awareness, stimulating their senses as well as giving them tender loving care it all seems to be paying off and the staff is pretty proud of their residents," Vaiano said.

Director Stein said that the place has a long waiting list. "All the residents must come from Willowbrook but we prefer to keep the numbers small here. If they get too high it's back to institutionalized living type of arrangement rather than what we have striven for here as an interim care facility."

Stein also noted on the basis of Nina Eaton's success rate the United Cerebral Palsy people are now aiming their sights towards bringing up a proposal for a similar type of program in the Bronx with the residents maximum age being 15. The property the UCP have their eye on is currently a skilled nursing home for geriatrics that the owner proposes to sell.

"Another plus in running a place like this," Stein said, was "that the cost factor is about \$26,000 per resident a year whereas at Willowbrook it runs anywhere from \$30 to \$35,000 for each resident a year."

News photos by Jim Garrett
Carmen Scifo works with youngsters during class dealing with personal grooming.

