

# Foster homes needed for Willowbrook folk, once 'rejected'



Three home placement candidates enjoy each others' company while they work in Willowbrook's sheltered work-shop.

By SANDRA ZUMMO

Have you ever had one of those days when you are convinced that nobody likes you?

Even though you can't remember saying or doing anything untoward, you sense resentment and get the uncomfortable feeling that you are cut off from others.

Can you imagine having that experience for days? Weeks? Months? Years?

If you are 37 years old, developmentally disabled and have been a Willowbrook resident for a quarter of a century, such an experience can become a way of life.

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The Metropolitan Placement Unit, housed in Building 2 of the Willowbrook Developmental Center, is charged with the responsibility of placing approximately 200 clients who are native Islanders back into the Island community.

Ideally, one-third of these can go into foster care. The other 150 may be placed in group homes, health-related facilities, or highly specialized family care situations.

To date, about 10 people have been placed into foster homes, four on the strength of an appeal made in these

pages in September. Of the 10, six are under age 21 and in the mild to moderate range of retardation.

"We have a small group, say another 10 in this category, waiting for placement," comments Andrew Cook, borough coordinator of the MPU. He foresees little problem in placing the remaining youngsters.

It is another group of Willowbrook residents that Cook worries about relocating.

At least 100 of the Island residents

Is there room in your home and heart for one more person? If so, you might be able to assist the Metropolitan Placement Unit in accomplishing the task set before it. There are persons of varying ages, abilities and ethnic backgrounds available for placement in the community now. For information, call Andrew Cook, the borough coordinator, at Willowbrook, at 698-1691.

still in the facility are between the ages of 21 and 60 and were placed in Willowbrook as children.

Cook terms them the "forgotten" people, explaining that they did not have the advantage of enlightened thinking on

mental retardation when they were young.

He maintains that had these residents not been put into Willowbrook, "there's a chance that some of them might have wound up more, well, more 'normal.'"

Cook and his staff are anxious to place this older group and give them the chance they have been denied all their lives. But, the MPU is not having an easy time of it.

"Everyone wants to do for the kids," Cook says. "As a result, most of them are gone. But people are more reluctant to take the older ones. I don't understand it...they are a lovely group; mellow, and, in some ways, easier to work with than the youngsters."

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"He has a very poor self-image," the case-worker explained.

He was discussing John, a Bronx native, who was brought to the Island, and Willowbrook, soon after his 12th birthday.

"John's basic problem is that people have been putting him down all his life