

# Fund-raising effort set to send Willowbrook residents to camp

By ROBERT MIRALDI

Carmella is 40 years old and was institutionalized at Willowbrook Developmental Center when she was a child. She is a victim of cerebral palsy and has little use of her arms or legs.

Officials at the center are convinced of her intelligence and they say she understands all that goes on around her. Last year she was expecting to spend two weeks in a summer camp, in the woods, near a lake, with other disabled persons.

Willowbrook didn't have enough money to send Carmella to camp, however.

"I had to tell her she couldn't go," Camp Coordinator Ron Kleinhandler recalls. "She cried for two days. She just sat and cried for two days. I don't want to have to tell her again."

If Kleinhandler and parents active at the center have their way, no one will have to tell Carmella this year. Willowbrook is hoping that Staten Islanders will dig down and help raise funds to send almost 600 center residents to a summer camp.

Last year Willowbrook sent 402 residents to eight different summer camps in New York and Pennsylvania. Another 71 residents were off to Boy Scout camp. There were another 100 residents, including Carmella, who were told that money was not available for them.

The approximate cost for two weeks at a camp is \$350 per resident. This year there are 590 residents eligible for summer camp which means that over \$200,000 would be needed. Some of that money will come from personal funds available to residents.

Still more money will come from the state Department of Mental Hygiene which provided \$21,000 last year. Parents are hoping for more money this year, especially since the parents group, the Willowbrook Benevolent Society,

will not be able to provide as much as last year.

"Why shouldn't a retarded person be allowed to have a vacation?" asks Kleinhandler, a Brooklyn resident who says he attended camp each summer as a youngster. Kleinhandler calls it "just normal" to send a person to camp.

Linda Carelli, director of the center's office of consumer affairs, points to the therapeutic value of leisure time. She points out that Willowbrook's residents spend six hours each day in varying work activity and training programs. "They need time off," she says.

Willowbrook's first fund-raising effort will be Saturday May 14 when One to One, a voluntary group which raises funds for retarded persons, holds a walkathon in Central Park, Manhattan. Wil-

lowbrook will provide transportation.

Willowbrook officials are hoping that Island residents will volunteer to walk around the park to raise money for Willowbrook residents. The officials ask that anyone interested in the walkathon should register at Willowbrook by calling 698-1440, extension 442 or 529.

Even more so, however, officials are hoping for donations from Island residents or businessmen. Checks should be made out to the Benevolent Society for Retarded Children and should be earmarked for the summer camp program.

Already contributions have been received from the Wagner College student union and the College of Insurance Circle K Club. "Carmella has missed too many summer camps already," Ms. Carelli says.