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250 by 1981, by discharging residents to less restrictive community group homes.

How to achieve this, quickly but not rashly, with due process and consideration for individual need, has resulted in a gumbo-melee of conflicting thoughts by as many as a dozen vested interest groups, all of which proclaim they are thinking "only about the residents."

That may be true. But it is also sadly apparent that the residents of Willowbrook sometimes become the unwitting victims of a system mired in paperwork, number games and the following factions at work:

Parents

Plaintiffs in Willowbrook's ongoing federal court case, the parents of the institutionalized retarded attempt to correct what they see as persistent abuse and neglect of their children.

They are far from a united group, often at odds on the issues, but the activist parents speak for the rest and cast blame on the state or the union for Willowbrook's lingering woes.

Twice now, since the April 1975 signing of the precedent-setting Consent Decree, the parent groups, led by attorneys from the American Civil Liberties Union, have marched back into court, charging state officials with contempt and incompetence over alleged failure to implement basic terms of the judgment.

It was these desperate and saddened parent groups, which include the Willowbrook Benevolent Society and the New York Association for Retarded Children, that sought the UCP takeover in the first place, as a way to achieve the long-sought goal of better care for the institutionalized retarded.

If the parent groups are criticized at all, it is for their oversensitivity when it comes to approaching Willowbrook's perennial crises.

For in their zeal to right the years of wrongs at the institution itself, occasionally some of them lose sight of the future — and the all-important task of seeking homelike settings for the retarded, back in the communities where they were born.

State

Gov. Carey, as the state's chief executive, is a named defendant in the federal court case, responsible himself for effecting change at the beleaguered public institution.

And under him is the Department of Mental Hygiene, the massive state agency with a budget of \$1 billion plus, that actually operates Willowbrook as well as dozens of other institutions for

the retarded and mentally ill.

As Willowbrook loses an average of one director every seven months, there is often a vacuum of leadership there, leaving Thomas A. Coughlin, a deputy commissioner of DMH, to attempt to maintain order from his Albany office.

And Coughlin, Carey and others, as typified in their handling of the UCP affair, receive the brunt of the criticism from all sides.

The parents took them to court in the first place, making them agree this latest time to the private takeover or face the prospect of sentencing on contempt charges.

The federal court and its appointed arm complain of foot-dragging by state officials, who seem reluctant to comply with a number of key pledges.

And the federal government, too, gets its licks in, saying the institution — the recipient of millions of dollars in U.S. aid each year — is not up to an additional set of federal standards.

The state's on-again, off-again style of negotiating with UCP over a takeover agreement was questioned by the palsy group, whose officials maintained they were kept in the dark for months.

And the union of public workers — a formidable opponent with 4,000 members at Willowbrook alone — has filed lawsuits, conducted demonstrations and is now threatening to strike the management's massive home for the retarded over the fear and unhappiness that accompanies unsettled futures.

But state officials nevertheless contend the UCP takeover is what they want and must do, because it will afford them the opportunity to reduce Willowbrook's patient load — to approximately 1,750 residents — making the institution a more manageable size.

And the numbers game continues. Just this week, for instance, Coughlin, who had been saying there'd be no layoffs as a result of UCP's presence at Willowbrook, said there will be layoffs because of the reduction in population.

He doesn't know how many or when, he says. And at a paranoid moment, one wonders if that just might be the case — that no one really does know what is happening.

But the memos, recommendations, meetings and telephone calls continue to filter across a top-heavy bureaucracy, consuming hours of a single working day — all (and too often, not) for the residents.

Courts

The federal courts changed the nature of Willowbrook in April 1975, when a Consent Decree, signed by parents and state officials, established the rights of the retarded to equal protection under the law.

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