

# Willowbrook needs a purposeful plan

By EDAPPARAYILE MATHEW

United Cerebral Palsy, which took over the baby complex at the Willowbrook Developmental Center in September, claims that, under its care, residents have made measurable progress.

If they could do that, why has it not happened at the rest of Willowbrook?

It is mainly because the very system is functioning in the wrong way. Remember, it is not enough to send the residents to school or programs for six hours and then bring them back to wards and treat them as patients or idiots, forsaken and unwanted by everyone.

So what is wrong?

One of the main problems is that there is no purposeful, structured and coordinated educational and recreational program.

Since the Willowbrook Consent Decree was signed, the state has been spending a lot of money to improve the living conditions of the residents, to fulfill the court order. But all of the money may not do much good unless there is a coordinated and purposeful plan, with individual programs working with the same goals, all trying to achieve the same end results.

What do I mean by saying this? The point will be made clear by understanding the existing system.

What is happening today is a case of the right hand not knowing what the left hand is doing. The attendants in wards do not know the problems of their residents: they do not know what the teachers, and therapists, are trying to do.

The attendants dress the kids and feed them — that's it.

The recreation therapist spends time with the residents and sends them back to the ward. What do they try to do? What particular behavior modification is the program aimed at?

Nobody knows.

The schools and workshops keep the kids for many hours. They do something in the name of education, but what is it they are trying to do?

How much do the residents profit from all of this?

Very little, because the efforts are not coordinated, purposeful and goal-orient-

ed. It is not enough to have goals and programs just on paper.

I know some therapists will dispute this. Everybody has got goals on paper. But these goals are not coordinated, so the end result is nil, or very little.

As a test, go to some of the buildings at Willowbrook and individually ask group leaders, attendants, recreation therapists or nurses what exactly they are trying to do for a given resident at the present time.

The reply will probably be "I don't know" or a general, vague answer such as "better movement, muscular coordination."

If one wants to have really good results, the institution needs a coordinated, unified and purposeful plan to achieve specific goals within a specified period.

Attendants, recreation therapists, teachers, nurses, psychologists, social workers and doctors — all dealing with the same patients — should sit together, identify problems and then set specific goals for individual patients within a certain period.

Then, on the wards, all of these staff people could work together with the same purpose, using the same means to achieve the goals. Residents would be under guidance 24 hours a day because every member of the team would be conscious of what they were trying to do.

Such a conscious, purposeful, coordinated program could bring measurable progress with the same expense.

It is not being done now, at least not in practice. That is what I mean by saying that the right hand does not know what the left is doing.

There is no coordinated, purposeful and specific time-bound, goal-oriented program.

Though everybody does something, the residents may not be showing much progress.

Finally, it all may lead to frustration.

(The writer, who taught in his native India, has been employed at the Willowbrook Developmental Center since 1975.)