

## ACTING DIRECTOR GETS WILLOWBROOK POST

Elin M. Howe, 31, to Head Center  
for the Retarded on S.I.

By PETER KIHSS

Elin M. Howe, a 31-year-old public administration expert, is being named director of New York State's often-controversial Willowbrook Developmental Center on Staten Island, a faculty a court monitor said yesterday was "on a steady uphill climb."

Reporting the appointment, Thomas A. Coughlin 3d, Acting State Commissioner of Mental Retardation, said Miss Howe (whose first name is pronounced eel-lynn) was probably the youngest person ever to head one of the state's 20 centers for the retarded.

Miss Howe, acting director of Willowbrook since last September, was designated as Governor Carey's new budget allocated \$40,747,200 for Willowbrook, down \$8,970,727 from current spending. The budget called for further reducing the number of patients there from a current 1,650 to 1,100 by March 31, 1979, and the staff from 3,800 to 2,006.

Dr. Jennifer L. Howse, director of the Willowbrook Review Panel set up by the order of the Federal District Court in Brooklyn, said a "philosophy" of budget reductions would be in line with the court decree to reduce the center's resident patients to 250, all from Staten Island, in 1981.

### Miss Howe Praised

She added she was "personally very pleased" about Miss Howe's appointment. The new director holds a master's degree in public administration from Boston University, and Mr. Coughlin said he first brought her to Willowbrook when he himself served as acting director in 1976.

Commissioner Coughlin said that about 80 community residences have been opened up, housing 400 to 450 former Willowbrook patients and as many others admitted directly from the neighborhoods involved, since the 1975 court order.

"Generally the program has been well accepted and going along quite well," he said. However, last Saturday night, a deliberately set fire destroyed the former home of the late educator, John Dewey, on Greenlawn Avenue in Huntington, L.I., which the state had bought for \$100,000 as a residence to be operated by the Suffolk Association for Retarded Children.

Commissioner Coughlin said a new residence would be built on the site.

Governor Carey's budget said that Willowbrook "currently has staff far in excess of that required" either by Federal regulations or the stiffer court ratios. He said "a substantial portion of the reduction should be accomplished through attrition."

### Staff Absentee Rate Cited

Mr. Coughlin said Willowbrook had had an "extremely high" staff absentee rate of 30 percent daily, compared with 6 to 7 percent in other centers. He attributed this to transportation problems for employees living in other boroughs and New Jersey.

The staff reduction, he said, could be accomplished without layoffs if the Legislature would pass a bill to give him "centralized appointing authority." Currently, a center director hires and dismisses employees; the bill would let the Commissioner transfer employees, who might otherwise lose their jobs, from one center to another.

Statewide, the budget plans call for reducing the number of residents in all centers from 16,335 to 14,985 by March 31, 1979, and making placements of 650 to community residences of 10 to 15 beds each, 500 to halfway houses operated by the state and 200 to family care in their own homes or independent dwellings. This would be in addition to 2,500 already expected to be living in community settings as of next April 1.