

She's the happy new director at Willowbrook Center



ELIN HOWE, the new 31-year-old director of Willowbrook Development Center on Staten Island, is approaching her job with the energy and cheerfulness of a dedicated housekeeper airing out a haunted house.

"I'm enthusiastic about what I've got to do," she said. "This is a happy time to be taking over, and it's my chance to make some important and lasting contributions."

Miss Howe has a master's degree in public administration from Boston University, and has been working in Albany for the State Mental Hygiene Dept. since 1972.

She is the youngest person ever to head any of the

By Georgiana Pine

20 state centers for the retarded. She has been at Willowbrook a year, first as deputy director of administration, then, since September, as acting director.

"All those horror stories about Willowbrook overshadowed the very real good that was being done here, even then," she said.

Much of her work will be directing the court-ordered exodus of Willowbrook's retarded residents into group homes in the community. At present there are 1600; by 1981 there will be 250

remaining, all from Staten Island.

"I'm an impatient person," said Miss Howe, whose first name rhymes with "seal-in." "I don't like to wait a long time for things to happen. I've had to learn to wait for things to take their course."

She plans to go before civic associations and other groups to try to melt community opposition to the setting up of group homes for the retarded.

"People resist the entrance of the retarded in their communities because they're fearful. When they understand what such homes really involve, they'll be much more willing to accept them," she said.

Miss Howe can be very persuasive. Her voice is usually soft, but when she speaks of the people at Willowbrook it gets as rock-hard as the mountains of her native Massachusetts.

"I'm going down the road with Willowbrook," she said. "I'm here for the long term. That's been one of its problems in the past—too many directors in a short time."

"At this moment I'm 10 years ahead of any career plans I ever had. I've got plenty of time, and that's what Willowbrook needs—

QUOTE

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Elin Howe