

Changes continue at Willowbrook

In response to Ms. Costagliola's letter published in the Feb. 14, edition of the Advance:

Ms. Costagliola, I sympathize with you and realize your frustrations concerning conditions at Willowbrook. All I can say is that you should have been there in 1970. The atrocities which occurred daily in the 40/41 complex, where I was employed at the time, made the Vietnam war resemble a high school football game. Of course this statement is not made in defense of present conditions; however, we must realize that in our country, and in any country of the world, social ills are not rectified overnight.

Back in 1970, our retarded population was a forgotten breed of mankind. The money allocated to agencies such as Willowbrook in most parts of the country barely guaranteed these unfortunate individuals life, let alone therapeutic services.

With the expose of Willowbrook by the news media in 1972, the movement towards guaranteeing our retarded citizens their rights finally began. It was the New York Association for Retarded Children who brought court action in 1975 against state officials, demanding that changes be made at Willowbrook.

Although the process has been slow, changes have occurred. I, as well as many, have personally witnessed these changes, one of which has been the takeover by United Cerebral Palsy of seven buildings. These include the 40/41 complex which services children from all of the seven buildings. As in the past, this new change has resulted in a tremendous amount of criticism from Willowbrook staff members.

For the past five months, I have had the experience of working as part of the United Cerebral Palsy staff at Willowbrook. United Cerebral Palsy's presence here is just another change in the movement towards guaranteeing handicapped citizens their rights, regardless of the degree of their mental or physical disabilities.

Ms. Costaliola, we as educators must accept change and allow it to run its course before we stand in judgment. Five months can be viewed as a day in the history of Willowbrook.

We as educators of the retarded await the day when our dreams for our children are fulfilled and when places such as Willowbrook become institutions of the past.

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