

Center's residents do get attention

I think it's time someone said something good about Willowbrook (now known as Staten Island Developmental Center), rather than constantly downgrading this institution.

On Friday, May 5, I watched the Jeanne Paar show on Channel 2, on which Felton King (C.S.E.A.) appeared. This program really upset me. For a long time I have strongly resented all the degrading, nasty comments being made about us. Geraldo Rivero really downgraded us when he visited here some five years ago. As Felton King said, he, Geraldo Rivero, visited a profoundly retarded building at 6 a.m. at the changing of the shifts, when there were one or two attendants taking care of 100 residents. Didn't he realize that it is absolutely impossible for one or two attendants to take proper care of all of these profoundly retarded residents at this time or at any time of the day? The responsibility for the care of these residents should have been placed on the state to staff the building properly, and not on the institution itself.

When I went through orientation two years ago the class was taken on a tour through the grounds of this institution. We visited many buildings and also the workshops, which are doing a wonderful job. The building that made the strongest impression on me was the one which houses the severely and profoundly mentally retarded and physically disabled residents. I saw what the attendants were doing for these residents (physical therapy, constant attention and much, much love). These scenes touched me so much (as it did many others) that I actually had tears in my eyes.

I asked the representative of the tour if Geraldo Rivero had visited this particular building. She said that he had, but in his report this building was not mentioned. He only publicized the bad side of Staten Island Developmental Center — a picture of one undressed resident sitting in a corner, which everyone in the United States probably saw via TV. I repeat, Geraldo Rivero has really downgraded us.

The subject of love was brought out on this program. A parent asked if our residents receive love. My answer is "Yes, they receive much love." I am a stenographer in one of the buildings but I, myself, have much contact with the residents in this building. I have joined the Volunteer Services, which allows me to take residents to my home for a visit. I have taken two of them home several times. These particular kids are confined to the institution, with no contact or visits from their families. They have been forgotten and deserted by them. Our Volunteer Services enables us to take them to our homes, give them a good meal and much happiness. There are many volunteers like myself who take residents to their homes. This just goes to prove that we really do care about our residents. From Unit Chief down to a Grade 3 we all care and give them the attention and love which they need so badly.

The subject of community placement was brought up. We go along with these placements (group homes, hostels or family care — many of them have been placed) as long as the residents get the care that they need after they leave. They need caring attendants, and psychiatric and psychological counselling, if necessary. Before our residents are placed, their proposed placements are investigated thoroughly to see that they will get the care and attention that they require.

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