

Center employees blamed too long

As you read this letter, the statement will probably pass through your mind, "Oh no, another article (or letter) about Willowbrook."

I hope this thought leaves your mind very quickly, because I have not taken the time to write just another letter about Willowbrook.

The purpose of my letter is to try to turn around the bad reputation the state employees at Staten Island Developmental Center (formerly Willowbrook) and in similar facilities have acquired through the news media, the public, etc.

Yes, it is true that at one time there were approximately 100 residents on a ward at a time. Yes, it is true that the residents at Staten Island Developmental Center were not given the best of care for their everyday needs. Yes, it is true that the residents did not receive the best medical care at one time.

But are all these factors the fault of the direct care state employee? No, they are not!

Would you like to work on a ward with 100 severely retarded residents and be responsible for feeding, dressing, toileting and the everyday needs that are required for human beings to function?

As late as 1972 there were many employees responsible for the care of 100 residents. By the time they had dressed the 10th resident the first resident would have his clothes off again. It would be near impossible to care for 100 people of average intelligence, let alone 100 severely retarded people.

You the public stand out there bad-mouthing state employees. But are you dedicated enough to handle the responsibilities of working with retarded people, let alone 100 clients? You know that the majority of you are not. I have heard people in the community say, "I feel sorry for those poor retarded people, but I could never work with them" or, "I give those people credit who work with those retarded people, I could never do that." But, as soon as something adverse is publicized about the quality of care for the residents, etc., in the news media, right away it is the fault of the lower paid employees.

You cannot blame the employees who work with these residents every day, care for their needs, and in many cases even extend themselves after working hours for the residents they love.

Is it the employees' fault that there was only one employee hired to take care of 100 residents?

Was it the employees' fault that there were not sufficient medical services given?

Please give your dedicated employees at Staten Island Developmental Center credit, where credit is due.

Yes, there are some employees who are "bad employees." Every type of business or concern has its "bad apples" also.

And don't think that United Cerebral Palsy can provide better care for retarded residents (as they so preach). It is a fact that many of the employees hired by U.C.P. were ex-employees of Staten Island Developmental Center that were fired because they were "bad apples."

It is all one big political game at the expense of the dedicated employees who work directly with these residents all day.

Don't blame the employees for staffing needs, supply needs, insufficient budget funds, etc. They have been blamed enough for the higher management employees who would probably cringe in their skins at the thought of having to work on a ward with retarded people.

Do you think that you could take all the abuse that has been given to these employees?

Do you think that you could care for these residents at the salary rate of \$7,500 starting pay?

How would you like to be denied time off for an important affair, or for a vacation because of the shortage of staff? You probably wouldn't want to work under these conditions.

In the past week the truth is starting to finally come out to the public.

Judge Bartels has ordered that the governor, the commissioner, the director hire more staff to properly care for the retarded persons at the Developmental Center. It is about time that the courts place the blame where the blame belongs, and not on the hard-working lower-paid employees.

The employees at the Developmental Center can probably identify with Alex Haley's book, "Roots," because after all these years of harassment, humiliation, and blame they may be finally reaching their "freedom" of not having to take the blame any longer.

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