

Retarded deserve proper way of life

Yes, Willowbrook was a dream. An ill-fated dream founded on the misconception that a centralization and concentration of services could help train the mentally retarded "to reach their potential." An idea with a hint of logic, but tell me how an individual can best be taught to reach his or her potential as a functioning member of the community when he or she is segregated from society? All Willowbrooks were failures in this respect. They were successful in removing the mentally retarded from their homes and families.

The attempt to correct this error is far from "a dumping procedure." Each group home which opens is part of a well-planned process from thorough engineering and architectural inspections, client screening and preparations, and alignment of all necessary medical, employment staff, and follow-up services.

Any citizen who feels this is not the case would be more than welcome by any agency operating a group home to visit and see the quality of care and homelike atmosphere which exists there. The people who have availed themselves of these offers to look and see come away believing in this genuine effort to provide the best living and learning opportunities for the mentally retarded. Unfortunately, there are those individuals who will not take a look. They do not want large Willowbrooks, and they especially do not want little Willowbrooks next door. Their fears are unfounded and based upon misinformation which they refuse to let be corrected.

I fear that the reality behind these circumstances is a desire by some to just put "them" away somewhere, where nobody will have to see or hear the cries for help, except those we pay to care for them. That is not where our responsibility lies toward our fellow human beings. If our concern and real interest is for maximum living potential for the mentally retarded, which is every individual's right, then let us weigh the possibilities at hand with openness, and not blind ignorance.

RICHARD MURRAY,

Eltingville