

Willowbrook officials ask: How did woman disappear?

An internal investigation is being undertaken by the Staten Island Developmental Center to find out why a retarded woman was missing from the facility for two days, according to a center official.

The woman, Helen Lever, 29, who is blind and deaf, was found yesterday morning by security guards in a field at the Willowbrook facility, according to the official, Jim Shea, deputy director for administration.

"At this time we don't know how it really occurred," said Shea, who is heading the investigation by the facility's administrative staff. "We're trying to put the sequence together as to the last few days."

Shea said at the present time no employees are suspected in the disappearance of the woman. Police thought Miss Lever might have been abducted due to her handicaps and that a screen covering a window on her ward building was found slashed. The screen has subsequently been repaired, according to Shea.

Shea said the facility's security, which has been criticized in the past, is not understaffed.

He said he could not speculate about how long the investigation would last, saying "it depends on how many loose ends we turn up." He also said he would

not theorize on how the disappearance occurred.

"I'd rather not get specific at this point," he said, citing an ongoing police investigation.

Shea said Miss Lever was taken to the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital, Clifton, and was found in good condition except for some scratches she received in the field.
