

Center probes drowning of resident, 21

Two in-house investigators for the Staten Island Developmental Center, Willowbrook, are interviewing 17 staff members concerning their whereabouts when a 21-year-old mentally retarded resident died this weekend at an upstate Boy Scout camp.

An autopsy yesterday disclosed that the retarded man, Edwin Garcia, died Sunday night of accidental drowning, according to Sullivan County Coroner Thomas Masterson.

Garcia, a developmental center resident whose family lives in the Bronx, had arrived at Camp Kuntah — part of the Ten-Mile River Boy Scout Camps near Narrowsburg, N.Y. — about four hours before his death, according to officials.

Elin Howe, director of the state-run institution, said yesterday that investigators were "trying to determine at this point if everyone was doing exactly what they were supposed to do" when Garcia disappeared from the campsite.

Miss Howe said the ratio of staff to campers, whom she described as severely retarded, was "appropriate" and not a subject of the inquiry. Seventy developmental center residents made the 2½-hour trip from Staten Island to the camp under the supervision of 17 staff members, she said.

When Garcia disappeared, however, several staff members reportedly were in the nearby town of Monticello, Miss Howe said.

She explained that the scheduled course of events had been disrupted when the bus that had transported Garcia and 36 other residents to the camp broke down on arrival at 5:30 p.m.

Miss Howe said the counselors left the site reportedly in search of a mechanic.

"I think the staff did a commendable job; they were cooperative in every form," Joe Lynch, an investigator with the Ferndale Barracks of the state police who participated in the two-day search, said yesterday. "I'd be the last one to doubt them because they were really heartbroken over the whole incident."