

trone argued. "Now we're in the position of trying to play catch up."

"It is becoming virtually impossible to find appropriate housing stock in New York City to meet institutional code requirements," he said, "and where it is available, it is extraordinarily expensive."

State Senator Frank Padavan, chairman of the Senate's Mental Hygiene Committee, is among those who have questioned the panel's usefulness. He has said repeatedly that the panel engaged in questionable practices, such as placing small groups of "profoundly retarded youngsters" in costly, high-rise apartments that were unsuitable clinically. He and other critics contend that such actions were unrealistic and were taken only to meet the court-imposed deadline.

Meanwhile there is some evidence that in the absence of the panel, the rate of movement of the retarded into the community has slowed. The court, in subsequent orders, set a specific schedule for that exodus — a schedule to which the state agreed, as in a September 1978 order: "All defendants hereby stipulate that absent extraordinary circumstances, unforeseen at present, other than impediments to community placement which have previously been reported to the court, the agreed 50 placements per month are entirely feasible and will be made by defendants."

Rarely has that happened. State records show that in 1978 the state should have found community homes for 666 of its retarded "clients," as they now are called. It actually placed 401, or 60 percent of the goal. In 1979 it achieved 62 percent of the movement ordered by the court. In 1980 the rate dropped to 48 percent. And since April 1980, when the review panel staff stopped functioning, the state has placed only 36 percent of what the court intended at a rate that has varied from 53 down to 11 per month.

"At the present rate of placement, the deinstitutionalization process at Willowbrook will not be completed for at least another eight years," said Mr. Hansen of the Civil Liberties Union.

In the midst of such high aims and mixed difficulties, the story of greatest dedication may be Al Gfadt's, a psychologist at the center. Every working day for the last three years Mr. Gfadt and his staff have been engaged in a necessary but unpleasant task of commitment: toilet training the untutored, the severely and profoundly retarded people who remain here under state care.

At the end of 1977, with almost 2,000 of the brighter members of the old Willowbrook population already transferred elsewhere, Mr. Gfadt designed and began to administer an ambitious program to teach that basic discipline of community life to hundreds of people who are physi-

cally adult but intellectually infantile.

The instruction is based on a reward system for which the main reward is a cookie. The training is endlessly repetitious. It can take as much as a year of 12-hour days to teach a profoundly retarded person the habit of recognizing a basic urge and reacting appropriately.

One recent afternoon, as one of his pupils, a 55-year-old man, shouted nearby, Mr. Gfadt said of the program: "When we began, there was a real sense of urgency. Well, the urgency is certainly gone — and the enthusiasm."

What began as an act of faith in the possible has been frustrated by the implacable. "The placements haven't been opening up in the community with the frequency or scope that was intended," he said. "Of the 67 people we've trained in this program, only two have been placed."

And 53 percent of the rest, he said, have regressed. Sometimes it happens when his pupils complete their training and are sent on to other training programs where the structure is different, he said, "and the bathrooms may be inaccessible."

#### Complex Responsibilities

The responsibilities involved in caring for the retarded and finding homes in neighborhoods for them are bureaucratic and complex. It is not the Staten Island Developmental Center's function, for instance, to find a place in some community home for all the residents still at Willowbrook. "It is the responsibility of the client's borough of origin to develop these sites and to resettle these clients in their own boroughs," said Dr. Ella Curry, the new director of the center.

Invariably some people who live in those neighborhoods fight the move.

"There are hundreds of arguments," said William P. Dwyer, who has worked to locate homes in Westchester County for the Developmental Disabilities Service Office there. "When we looked at a house up in Bedford, we were told that this was

horse country and the retarded people could get stepped on by the horses. They don't want to come out and say, 'We don't want retarded people here.' So they come up with all these smoke screens."

Roy Campanella, the former catcher for the Brooklyn Dodgers, sold his house of 15 rooms in Greenburgh to the state for \$90,000 several years ago. The house is handsome and private, and the grounds are well-kept and splashed with flower beds. But when eight men ranging from moderately to severely retarded were installed inside, the house was picketed by residents of the neighborhood.

#### Spite Reaction in Neighborhood

And when state officials on Staten Island attempted to place three retarded people in a house the state owned in the Emerson Hill section of the island, a group of neighbors filed a civil suit to stop it. They lost, and when the men moved in, one neighbor parked his Cadillac at the bottom of a common driveway to block access for the house staff and the van used to transport the house's residents.

In the massive brick buildings of the sprawling old Willowbrook campus itself, the problems are more grim. Prison-like in architecture, the huge institution stands as an anachronism in mid-transition, a mingling ground of hope, accomplishment, dispiritedness and gloom.

In comparison with the way it used to be — with the chaos, the filth, the overcrowding and the neglect that were so common a decade ago when it held 5,000 to 6,000 patients, as they were then called — the improvements are stunning. The institution is a sparser, cleaner, better-tended version of its former teeming self. Medical care is vastly improved, and every resident is required by the court to be given six hours of useful instruction every day.

#### Severe Cases Remain

"Everyone has a potential," said Dr. Curry, who took the director's post last November, "and we have a duty to help them reach that potential and to keep it." But the transfer out of thousands of the brighter clients — many of whom, by general agreement now, never needed to be committed in the first place — has left the most severely and profoundly retarded people behind. More than 300 of the 940 remaining are also multiple handicapped, their muscles atrophied and their bodies contorted by birth defects and years of previous neglect.

The large wood-working shop in the school building is closed and locked. Inside, its drills and saws and cutting tools gather dust. The classes in reading, writing, arithmetic and social studies that were taught when there were better-functioning residents at the facility no longer exist. The garden they used to tend has gone to weed. And staff morale, for those reasons and the fear of job loss as the phase-out continues, is critically low.

"The message is, here is a place that's dying," Dr. Curry said. "You look around, and it looks like it's dying."



The New York Times  
Judge Orrin G. Judd in 1973

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