

Willowbrook center layoffs bring confusion, disruption

By TOM ROBOTHAM

Dozens of clients at the Staten Island Developmental Center were deprived of educational programs and other coordinated activities yesterday in the wake of staff layoffs and transfers that went into effect at the facility Friday.

The lack of programming resulted from administrative confusion, James Walsh, deputy director for administration at the center, said.

"We expect that all clients will be receiving six hours of programming by Thursday," said Walsh.

A 1975 consent decree mandated that all clients at the facility receive six hours of programming per day.

Clients under 21 must receive educational programming. Oth-

ers may receive different programming such as physical therapy or recreational activity.

The decree also mandated that the state move clients into smaller community facilities. The mandate resulted in a decline in the number of clients at the facility from 5,000 in 1972 to the current 800. It was therefore necessary to lay off or transfer staff members, according to state officials.

But a staff member who called the Advance said many clients were being deprived of educational programming as a result of the layoffs.

"I just can't believe what's been done to this place," the staff member said. "The program's been devastated. It's been ripped apart."

A lawyer for the New York

Civil Liberties Union who represents clients at the center said he has also heard concerns that the quality and quantity of programming would decline.

The lawyer noted the U.S. District Court had appointed a "master" to monitor improvement efforts at the facility. The "master," Rudy Magnone, is director of Ohio's retardation department. He could not be reached for comment yesterday.

Walsh said as far as he knew there were only 60 clients "who did not receive their full complement of programming" yesterday. In any case, he said, yesterday's programming was not representative of services that would be offered to clients from now on.

Walsh said some clients were mistakenly sent to Building 3 yesterday. In addition, he said, some staff reassignments were not completed. He also said two or three vacationing staff members were not accounted for in the reshuffling.

Among those laid off or transferred to other facilities were 23 teachers, three supervisors and 16 teacher assistants, Walsh said. A lawsuit filed in Albany by the union representing the center workers cites different figures, however. The union says most of the 67 workers laid off are teachers or teacher assistants, and that wouldn't account for those transferred.

Prior to the layoffs and transfers, he said, some clients over 21 were receiving educational programming even though the law did not require such an arrangement. Now, he said, only those under 21 would receive educational programming.

He said they would be served by remaining teachers or developmental specialists (teachers who work 12 months a year instead of 10).