

P. J. Leonard 10/12/82

# Development center improvements noted

By TOM ROBOTHAM

An official monitoring improvement efforts at the Staten Island Developmental Center said he was encouraged by observations made during a tour of the facility yesterday.

"I think there's still a lot of things that need to be done," said the official, Kenneth Gossett. "But I was definitely encouraged by what I saw. I can't underscore that enough."

Gossett made the tour with Dr. Rudy Magnone, who was appointed by a federal judge to monitor improvement efforts at the facility. Gossett is assisting Magnone in monitoring the Willowbrook operation.

Meanwhile, problems with the center's educational programs, which arose last week, have been resolved, according to James Walsh, deputy director for administration.

Ironically, the professional staff was not working yesterday because of the Columbus Day holiday. Consequently, Gossett and Magnone could not assess the programs.

Last week, residents were deprived of classes and other organized activities because of administrative confusion in the wake of staff layoffs and transfers.

Walsh said 67 staff members were either laid off or transferred. More than half were teachers and teacher assistants, he said. But Walsh said the center retained enough professionals to provide programming mandated by a 1975 consent decree.

Under the mandate, the center must provide six hours of programming daily to residents 21 years old and under, and a variety of other kinds of program-

ming to those over 21.

Because of the staff cutbacks, the sizes of some classes for older residents would increase, Walsh said. Classes for those 21 and under must be conducted by licensed teachers and must have no more than six students. Those restrictions would be adhered to, he said.

Gossett said he and Magnone had tentative plans to meet with the center's board of directors on Oct. 22. At that time, he said, he hopes talk with the professional staff and assess the programming.

"I think we'll have a much better chance to see the full facility in operation at that time," he said.

Yesterday's visit was of a general nature, Gossett said. Magnone had never visited the center.

Gossett had toured the center in 1975, and he contrasted what he saw yesterday to conditions he observed seven years ago.

"The staff I talked with (yesterday) was a lot more optimistic about the future of the center," he said. "The staff morale was much higher than in 1975."

He also said there was a better staff-to-resident ratio and staff interaction with residents. "Overall I got a better sense of organization," he said.

Gossett, who is superintendent of a similar facility in Ohio, said directors of the Willowbrook facility are considering striving for national accreditation.

Accreditation would mean attaining considerably higher standards than those mandated under the consent decree, which dealt primarily with numbers of residents and minimum hours of programming, Gossett said.