S.E.R.V.E. celebrates 2 decades of service

ADVANCE PHOTO/**STEVE ZAFFARANO**

Mary McMurray, who now lives in the Carmel Richmond Nursing Home, has been a S.E.R.V.E. volunteer since the program began 20 years ago.

By CAROLYN RUSHEFSKY
ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

Every week, Mary "Mae" McMurray cuts and pastes colorful pictures onto placemats, to be used in the dining room at the Staten Island Developmental Center in Willowbrook. Teachers spin stories about the scenes, using them as education tools for the mentally disabled, explained Miss McMurray, one of six members of Serve and Enrich Retirement Through Volunteer Service (S.E.R.V.E.) taking part in the workshop.

This marks the 20th year that the 93-year-old Miss McMurray has been a S.E.R.V.E. volunteer. And since she was among the first 15 recruits, her length of service is as old as the organization itself.

She vividly recalls the tour of the Willowbrook State School in 1966, along with other prospective volunteers from the West Brighton Senior Center. "Some backed out," recalls Miss McMurray, now a resident of the Carmel Richmond Nursing Home, Dongan Hills. But she set about parlaying a decade of sewing experience at the Island's Valco Manufacturing Co. into volunteer work, sewing puff quilts, placemats and nightgowns for the severely retarded youngsters at the school.

Janet Sainer, now commissioner of the city Department for the Aging, who founded the Island S.E.R.V.E. unit two decades ago, recalls those early recruitment days.

"At first, not many volunteers chose working with the children;