

Willowbrook: Inside the cages

By JANE KURTIN

The boys in Building 6 pick at the sores on their naked bodies during the endless days they spend on wooden benches, curled on the floor or leaning against the walls of their warty cages.

They don't understand the indignity of being perpetually naked or the repulsiveness of their drooling. They don't understand that people are afraid to touch them.

Showers are given haphazardly in open stalls jammed into massed rows and stand not more than 2 inches apart. Possessed with these severely retarded minds, they have any, are not visible in a row upon a row of white iron beds.

Called for lunch, so young men respect once, in a single, chaotic rush for the door, they rushed for the door.

Some, crying and screaming for reasons not easily understood, tried to push their way past one of the three attendants who watch over them. Some, who slipped to the floor, began to crawl out.

The attendant, a pleasant woman, stamped her feet at the doorway and shouted to the boys on the floor to get back.

Whatever the boys in Building 6 are doing, they are doing it in a way that is not easily understood.

6 might learn, employees explained, has to come to them from normal persons. But normal persons aren't rushing into Willowbrook State School to help and the employees can't.

One case of a young man we'll call Alan, who created problems for already overtaxed employees was told by a member of the professional staff this way:

"Alan's record shows that for quite a while before he was put in seclusion, he was having

problems in school. The significant thing about this is that he was in school and of an IQ which deemed him educable.

"Eventually, Alan built one of the female attendants who couldn't handle him, and in May of 1969 he was put in seclusion.

"In January of this year, a letter was sent to James J. Murphy, deputy director here at Willowbrook, from another ranking official in the institution.

The letter informed Murphy that Alan had been in seclusion for over a year and that his condition had deteriorated drastically because of his isolation.

Murphy was apprised of the fact that Alan ate, slept, urinated and defecated in one room and that he should have been transferred to another building where attendants would be able to deal with him.

struggle, Alan was out for about a month. He's back in seclusion, however, because he scratched an attendant. He's 21 and no longer considered educable.

The terrible thing is that he was not destructive in school and if he'd gotten help with the problems he had then, all of this could have been prevented.

Willowbrook is the most degrading institution in the state.

worn, fading Advance library clipping captures the drama of Jane Kurtin's expose on the horrors inside what was then known as Willowbrook State School.