

**It's good news!****Progress seen  
in state care  
for retarded**By **MARC HUMBERT**  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

ALBANY — Basic living conditions at the state's centers for the mentally retarded have "greatly improved" in the two decades since the horror of the now-closed Willowbrook State School was exposed, a state commission reported yesterday.

The commission said that since 1976, the number of clients at the developmental centers has declined from about 25,000 to approximately 10,000.

The state, spurred by the revelations of neglect at Willowbrook and subsequent court suits, has been trying to move the mentally retarded into smaller residential facilities in recent years. Willowbrook later became the Staten Island Developmental Center. The facility is now closed and will be the site of the consolidation of the St. George and Sunnyside campuses of the College of Staten Island.

Nonetheless, the Commission on Quality of Care for the Mentally Disabled said expectations for improved quality of life within the state developmental centers were not always being met.

While the watchdog commission, after visits in 1986 to seven of the state's 20 developmental centers, said the centers were generally clean and safe for residents, it also said the residents weren't always given the level of care and training they deserved.

The commission said that in the seven centers there was a "consistent failure to meet expectations regarding attentiveness to the individual needs of residents and, with the exception of Sunmount Developmental Center, the expectation of active treatment and recreation programming."

Such services, said the commission, "are essential to foster growth and independence, and promote dignity among developmental center residents."

"Many living units at six of the seven centers were barren, without any decoration," said the commission. "Bedrooms especially were unattractive and uncomfortable."

The commission said residents at many of the centers lacked proper clothing and personal hygiene supplies and that "residents' privacy during bathing, dressing and toileting was compromised" at five of the seven centers.

The commission had special praise for the work being done at Sunmount, a former tuberculosis center in Tupper Lake in the heart of the Adirondack Mountains.

At Sunmount, said the commission, "professional staff and direct-care staff worked together as a team in all program areas, with professional staff encouraging and assisting direct-care staff to take an active training role with residents."

The commission also said that "program areas" at Sunmount were also attractively decorated and well-equipped with appropriate and diverse instructional supplies.

And while the commission had praise for some aspects of program services at the other six centers, they also had some criticisms.

"In at least half of the programs areas reviewed at Brooklyn and Manhattan developmental centers, most residents sat idly, slept or engaged in maladaptive behaviors," said the commission. "In four of the nine program areas visited at Rome Developmental Center, many residents were not engaged in activities. . . . Idleness was also prevalent in four of the 10 program areas reviewed at Wassaic Developmental Center" in Dutchess County.

While the commission had overall praise for conditions at the J.N. Adam center in Cattaraugus County and the Newark center in Wayne County, it said there was a staff shortage in some program areas at Newark and that at the Adam center, one program "offered virtually no activities to the profoundly disabled residents."

**Retarded**

A major problem at many of the centers, said the commission, was that much of the staff worked 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. schedules that, while convenient for the staff, left too few of them around "during peak resident skill-building opportunities" based "around waking, toileting, bathing, dressing and meal times."

In a letter to the commission, Mental Retardation Commissioner Arthur Webb said he was "encouraged that the commission's draft report . . . identifies that 'considerable progress was made by centers and NYS OMRDD (New York state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities) over the past decade improving living conditions in its facilities."

Webb's short letter largely ignored the criticisms contained in the commission's report.

"By and large, we think it was extremely positive," said Webb spokesman Louis Ganim of the commission report. "We've already addressed many of the things they pointed out."

Ganim also said that since the commission's visits to the centers, they have all been visited by the state Health Department as part of the federal certification process for such centers. The Webb aide said all the centers had passed the certification tests except Brooklyn, where deficiencies were cited that he said the department is trying to correct. Ganim said it was expected the Brooklyn center would be re-examined soon for possible full certification. At the moment, the Brooklyn center continues to operate, but new admissions aren't permitted.

In fact, it's discharges and not admissions that have become the norm within the state's mental retardation system.