

1965

Staten Island Advance publishes a series of articles called "What's Wrong With Willowbrook?" examining the deteriorating conditions for the mentally retarded at the Willowbrook State School. A month later, Sen. Robert F. Kennedy conducts a surprise inspection of the institution, describing it as a "snake pit."

1967

Some 27,000 people with developmental disabilities live in New York state institutions.

1971

The Advance publishes another series exposing horrific living conditions at Willowbrook.



1972

TV documentary by relatively unknown journalist Geraldo Rivera brings the sensational Willowbrook story to the nation's consciousness, prompting widespread public outrage and a class-action lawsuit by the parents of more than 5,000 Willowbrook children against the state and then-Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller.

1974

State schools renamed "developmental centers."

1975

Willowbrook Consent Decree signed, laying the groundwork for national reforms in the care, education and housing of people with developmental disabilities. A federal judge orders Willowbrook's population reduced to 250 by 1986, with former residents transferred to more humane environments, such as community residences.

1978

The state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) begins operation as a separate entity from the Office of Mental Hygiene and is responsible for the prevention and early detection of developmental disabilities and for the care, treatment, habilitation and rehabilitation of the affected population.

1978

Site Selection Law- also called the Padavan Law, named after state Sen. Frank Padavan- takes effect, creating a procedural framework for the establishment of community residences for people with developmental disabilities. The law is designed, in part, to prevent the oversaturation of houses for the developmentally disabled on a particular block or in a particular neighborhood, in essence isolating them from the wider community.

Early 1980s

Numerous local battles over the establishment of community residences for the developmentally disabled erupt across the borough.

1987

Willowbrook, at this time called the Staten Island Developmental Center, closes.

1990

President George Bush signs the Americans With Disabilities Act guaranteeing people with disabilities the same rights to employment and access to public facilities as other citizens.

1998

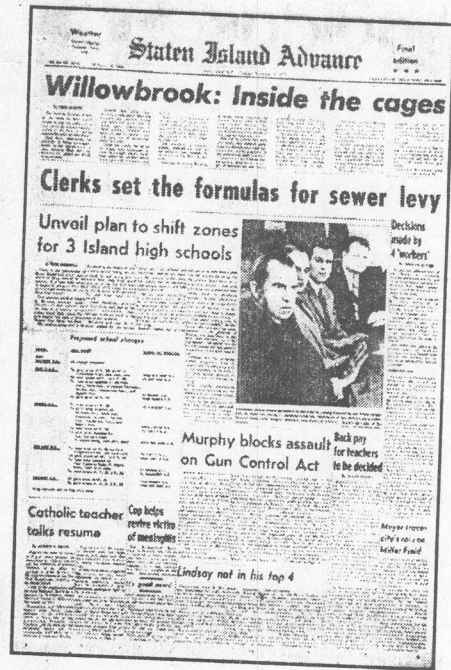
Just over 2,000 people live in state-run developmental centers.

1998

Gov. George Pataki announces New York State Creating Alternatives in Residential Environments and Services (NYS-CARES) initiative, a comprehensive five-year plan to eliminate the waiting list for out-of-home residential services throughout the state.

2000

Developmental centers population reduced to 1,000. Local human service providers say Staten Island needs about 40 new community residences in the next four years to reduce a waiting list of more than 200 Islanders.



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