

Siegel

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boils all the time.

"I did nothing, just sat and watched TV in the lounge. I was very embarrassed to sit like that all the time."

Today, Siegel lives with 14 others in a three apartment suite in Rego Park, Queens, managed by the Young Adult Institute. He keeps up with his father, a Florida newspaperman, and his brother, a winery worker in New Jersey, with visits and telephone calls. He sees friends for dinner and religious holidays.

By the terms of the Willowbrook Consent Decree, Siegel should be living as much as possible as if he were not handicapped. He makes some choices about his daily life and exercises a modicum of responsibility and self-expression. At home, several social workers provide supervision and counseling.

Siegel has a bank account and handles his own spending money. Because of his slow pace and poor balance, counselors allow Siegel to leave home only with another person. He negotiates crowded sidewalks and crosses the street carefully. Siegel has spoken to groups of mental health professionals about his life in and out of institutions.

"Martin's very content in his group home; he has a full life," his father said. "The move out of Willowbrook was tremendous. It made a man out of him and gave him independence."

Parents of mentally retarded children often fear for their offspring in new situations. The old ward may have had its faults, but it was familiar and alternatives were limited. The first days of Siegel's independence cost him physically and strained his father emotionally.

"I almost went to court when he was first in the Queens home because they let him out on the street and he was always falling down," Hy Siegel recalled.

"But the counselors trained him how to do it. I give them a lot of credit. And I'm very proud of Martin."

Siegel grew into his freedom. Now, at 44, he looks forward to his next residences, a house in Flushing, Queens.

"Since I'm still young," he said with a smile, "I can have the chance to be more independent. I will be able to take the (public) bus, instead of going everywhere in the van like we do here. A counselor's going to go with us until we learn."

Siegel will continue living with other mentally handicapped adults. He doesn't seem to mind; he knows no alternative.

"It's better than Willowbrook," said Ronnie Cohen, a staff consultant for the court-appointed Special Master's office, which oversees state compliance with the consent decree. She met Siegel shortly after he left Willowbrook.

Other experts complain that the group homes



resemble small wards. Professor Wolf Wolfensburger of Syracuse University defined any residence where 12 or more unrelated people live as an institution. Both Cohen and one of his counselors say Siegel could live on his own, as do about 200 former Willowbrook patients. Both doubt he will.

"The powers that be have not adopted the goal of normalization; group homes still have 10 to 15 people," Cohen said, who has been both a caseworker and a supervisor in programs for former Willowbrook patients. "Many clients work in sheltered workshops — non-vocational settings contrary to the spirit of the Willowbrook settlement."

Siegel works at United Cerebral Palsy's Katz Rehabilitation Center in Jamaica, Queens. Here, 150 mentally handicapped men and women perform repetitive tasks for low wages.

Some fill bags with potpourri; others assemble tool kits. Siegel loads trays with sanitary hypodermic needle covers. The work is for outside companies and employees are paid on a piece basis, depending on their production. Wages are a fraction of what an able-bodied person would earn at the minimum wage.

Siegel loads needle covers into blue trays. He sits at a set of brown work tables with a dozen colleagues.

"Some week, usually I make up to \$14, or even \$16, \$17, or \$18," Siegel explained. Learning to handle even this amount, his job counselor Susan Feig said, is a new accomplishment for Siegel after growing up in an institution where he was fed, clothed and given a bed.

Siegel's earnings are his to spend. Rent, food and other costs are covered by Supplementary Security Assistance and other governmental aid.

Siegel is a veteran at this shop, and has seen some colleagues graduate to jobs as messengers, clerks and janitors. Both he and Feig doubted he could do other work.

"I like it there," Siegel said. "I couldn't move on because of my handicap. I can't travel too far." Feig

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