

concluded, citing Siegel's poor balance. She also said his work pace is too slow.

Ronnie Cohen disagreed. She has seen many like Siegel in regular jobs.

"Martin could function very easily in supported employment, say in a bank where certain tasks are repetitive," she said. "It's ridiculous how he's been ingrained with this idea that he can't get around."

The Willowbrook Consent Decree requires that Siegel receive six hours of structured activity daily. His job fulfills that requirement but it is not leading to greater independence. For seven years he has filled up trays or performed similar tasks far away from the real world.

"He's wasting his time there," Cohen sighed.

At home, there is progress. Mentally retarded clients are often assigned, as part of their therapy, goals for progress in basic skills as hygiene and self-reliance.

"I can't go out by myself," Siegel said one day as he walked down 57th Avenue in Queens. "I used to go out by myself, but it got too hectic and I became nervous. That's when they gave me this traveling goal." He stopped at a crosswalk.

"No, we're not going to make it; that light's going to turn red." Siegel jutted his chin up toward a car in the intersection. "Look at that car; it shouldn't be on the white lines." He proceeded at the signal.

"I have to pick up my speed, to get from one side to the other before the light turns green. I mean red."

"When I can't go out, I practice at home with cards on the floor. And I try to go from back to front, front to back, left to right, right to left."

Siegel gestured stiffly, his whole torso turning toward each of the four directions, and then with a hand held vertically, he traces his passage from one to the other.

Critics like Bernard Carabello, director of the Self-Advocacy Association of New York, call the use of goals contrived and belittling to clients. He was a patient at Willowbrook for 18 years until his discharge in 1972.

"Every resident in a group home has to have a goal plan," he explained in his office on lower Broadway.

"Is that normal? In my home or your home there's

no such thing as a goal plan. When you're free to make up a your own goals for yourself, that's normalization. Mine is getting my driver's license."

Ellen Ashton of the Office of Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) disagreed. "You should set targets for behavioral change, and skill development," she said. "I doubt staff members would respond to the patient's needs without something written down. Without these formalities, there can be benign neglect."

One goal for Siegel, said his counselor at work, is to improve his table manners. "Sometimes he comes back from lunch and you can tell what's he's eaten," said Feig.

At home, the staff looks for self-discipline and good habits, such as checking with them when he goes out. Counselors try to protect their clients in the same way that the large institutions hid their wards from a supposedly hostile world. Siegel still is not getting to know that world.

Visitors are often quizzed by counselors about their purpose. Siegel talks with just one of his neighbors, a blind woman. Other tenants in the building know his apartment as "that transitional place."

Some responsibility is theirs; only the community can initiate new members, though there are barriers. A New York neighborhood of highrises may not offer the ideal setting for social integration. Siegel's lifestyle isolates him further.

He travels in a van, goes to a special Sunday school class and works in a sheltered workshop. Siegel lives, works and relaxes with other mentally retarded people. Rarely is he with non-handicapped people, other than staff, from whom he could learn how to live.

Within his world, Siegel strives for more independence.

"I try to do things for myself as much as possible. I started doing things for myself when I moved out of Willowbrook 15 years ago. I just started doing more, I guess. I'm trying to do more and more as I get older."

*(This is the second in a series of five articles. Tomorrow: Isabelle Weiner.)*