

# **Uncovering the truth behind Willowbrook's Horrors**

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Junior Group Project  
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## **Process Paper**

### **Why we choose this topic:**

Initially, our group faced challenges in selecting a topic that resonated with us. After seeking guidance from our teacher and exploring related themes, we stumbled upon Willowbrook State School. This institution, one shrouded in secrecy, exposes the appalling mistreatment and neglect of individuals with mental disabilities. Intrigued by the gravity of this topic, we chose to delve into the dark history of Willowbrook, shedding light on the long-overdue conversation surrounding mental health and the inhumane treatment of patients. We recognize the significance of this topic, tackling an often-overlooked issue that deserves recognition.

### **What type of sources did we use:**

Regarding the sources that our group used, they were all very mixed. We included some primary sources, including patients from Willowbrook that talk about their experiences and trauma. Aside from this we included Newsletters and other videos from News Anchors and other trusted websites such as the New York Developmental Disabilities. This helped our group have trustworthy evidence and use this to back up our claims on how Willowbrook would abuse their patients.

### **How we chose our project types:**

Initially, we considered creating a documentary, but my partner and I decided to leverage my technical expertise by developing a website instead. We collaborated on writing the content and I designed and built the website, making the process enjoyable.

**What new insights does our group's research bring to the historical narratives:**

This project brings forth new ideas such as primary sources that add depth to the problem created for patients and families by Willowbrook institution. Most families, as we described, were not even aware of the treatment that Willowbrook enforced on the children. This was majorly concerning considering the fact that Willowbrook was the number one school recommended by doctors to mentally disabled children.

**What were the most significant findings and insights:**

The most significant findings and insights were the conditions discovered by researchers such as Geraldo Rivera and Jane Kurtin after documenting their findings at Willowbrook Institution. My partner and I were both shocked after investigating photos and documents about how patients were left to fend for themselves. Residents, some as young as toddlers, lived in inhumane conditions, were dressed in rags, and even kept in cages. The institution was filthy and some patients even ate and lived in their own feces and urine. Obtaining this knowledge impacted our research tremendously, giving us an insight of how badly treated the people of Willowbrook were.