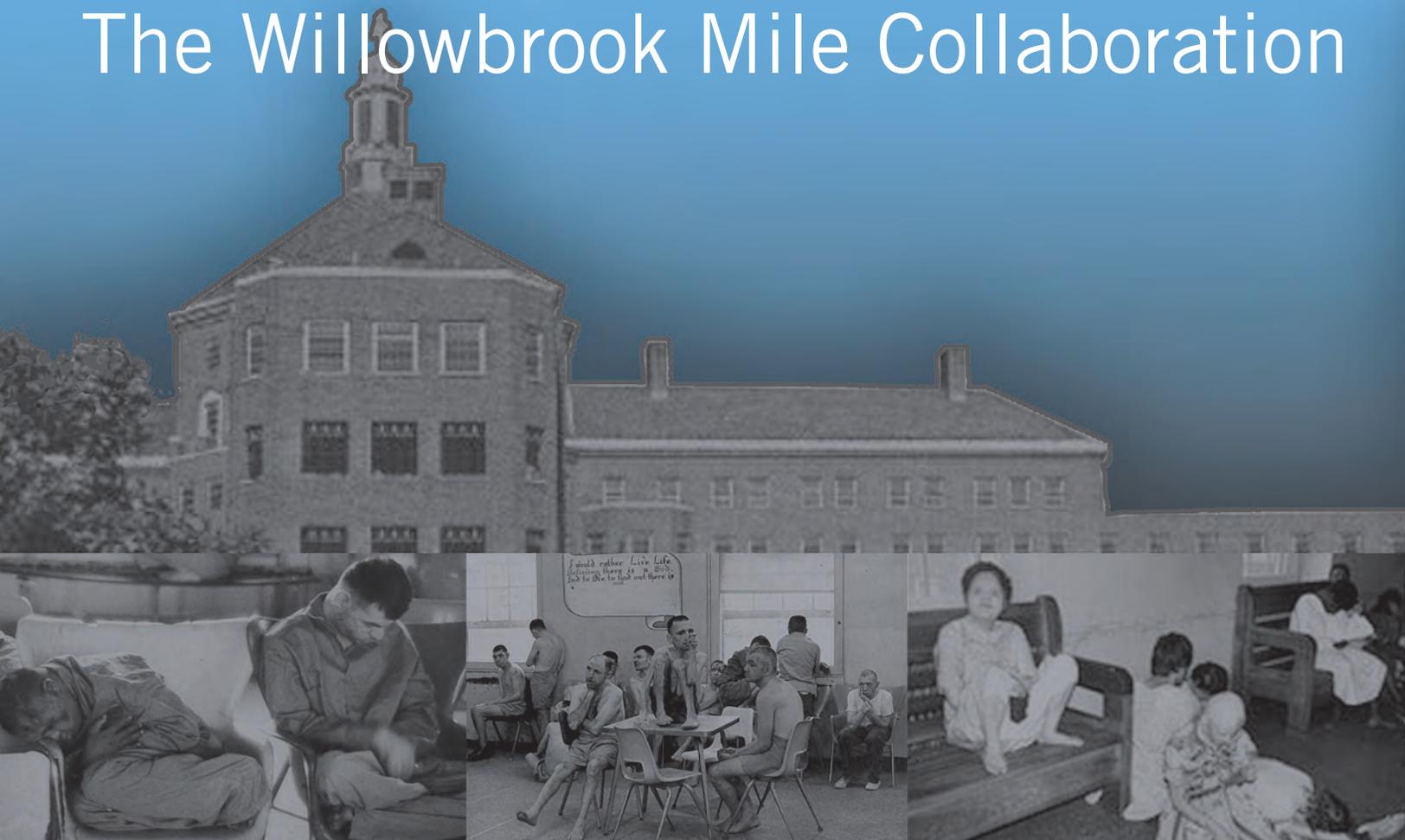




The Willowbrook Mile Collaboration





The Willowbrook Mile Collaboration

Executive Summary

The Willowbrook Mile project is a collaboration among the Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Council, the primary advocacy consortium for families and service providers for people with developmental disabilities on Staten Island; the College of Staten Island; the Institute for Basic Research in Developmental Disabilities; and the Elizabeth Connelly Resource Center/Office for People with Developmental Disabilities. Prior to the initiation of this project, the Council had developed the concept of creating a walking trail commemorating the Willowbrook State School and the College created a fitness trail with landmarks based on the Willowbrook State School. With the unification of these projects, the concept was formulated for a walking trail through the three distinct campuses that were created from the original 383 pastoral acres that were once the Willowbrook State School.

The shared vision for the former Willowbrook State School property is to create a pathway for everyone to share the history of the property that would be accomplished in an inclusive, productive, progressive, and creative manner within a community partnership. The Willowbrook Mile project aims to preserve the site's history and create a visionary presence that acknowledges the deinstitutionalization movement to empty large ineffective institutions, as well as the crucial initiation of sustained rights for people with disabilities.

In the early 1970s, Willowbrook burst onto the national scene following a series of articles published by the *Staten Island Advance* detailing the deplorable conditions that Sen. Robert Kennedy compared to a "snake pit" following his 1965 visit to the institution.

Following the Geraldo Rivera, *Eyewitness News* exposé, residents and their families joined civil libertarians and mental health advocates in a lawsuit against the state "to prevent further deterioration and to establish that residents had a constitutional right to treatment," according to *The New York Times*. In April 1975, the Willowbrook Consent Judgment was signed, and it has been used since as a model throughout the United States and in many parts of the world. This decree became a reality thanks to the commitment of families, advocates, numerous local and governmental agencies, community activists, and public officials, and the recognition by the Staten Island community that *all citizens* are protected from harm under the 8th and 14th Amendments to the Constitution of the United States.

The closing of the Willowbrook State School in 1987 ushered in a new era for the way disabled people are treated, as they transitioned from isolation and institutionalization to integration into community residences across the State. New methodologies for addressing the needs of people with disabilities have been embraced locally, regionally, and nationally, sparked by the events that took place at and because of Willowbrook.

The Willowbrook Mile uniquely creates an educational and fitness walking trail that connects the three neighboring properties. Reflection stations will be erected at sites along the pathway. The outdoor kiosks will be equipped with QAR scan code capability and contain audio, visual, and Braille signage components. At each station, visitors will be able to experience a particularly significant milestone in the history of the Willowbrook property. Some of the most notable sites include:

- the *Memorial Garden Plaque* recognizing the closing of Willowbrook and New York State's commitment to citizens with developmental disabilities;
- *Building 29*, which housed more than 100 residents whose families had originally lived on Staten Island;
- the *Willowbrook Archives & Special Collections*, sponsored by the College of Staten Island, which focuses on gathering documents that capture the experiences of Willowbrook residents, their guardians, and Willowbrook staff members at all levels with both primary and secondary materials that record the administrative history of the school;
- the *Institute for Basic Research in Developmental Disabilities*, opened in 1968 as the first large-scale institute in the world with a specific mandate to conduct basic and clinical research into the causes, treatment, and prevention of developmental disabilities; and
- the *Elizabeth A. Connelly Center Therapeutic Pool*, which commemorates the Assemblywoman's advocacy for people with disabilities. Her efforts will forever remain the benchmark for a committed political activist. The station will enumerate the breadth of present-day opportunities, which signify the focus of creating and sustaining community-based lives for people with disabilities.

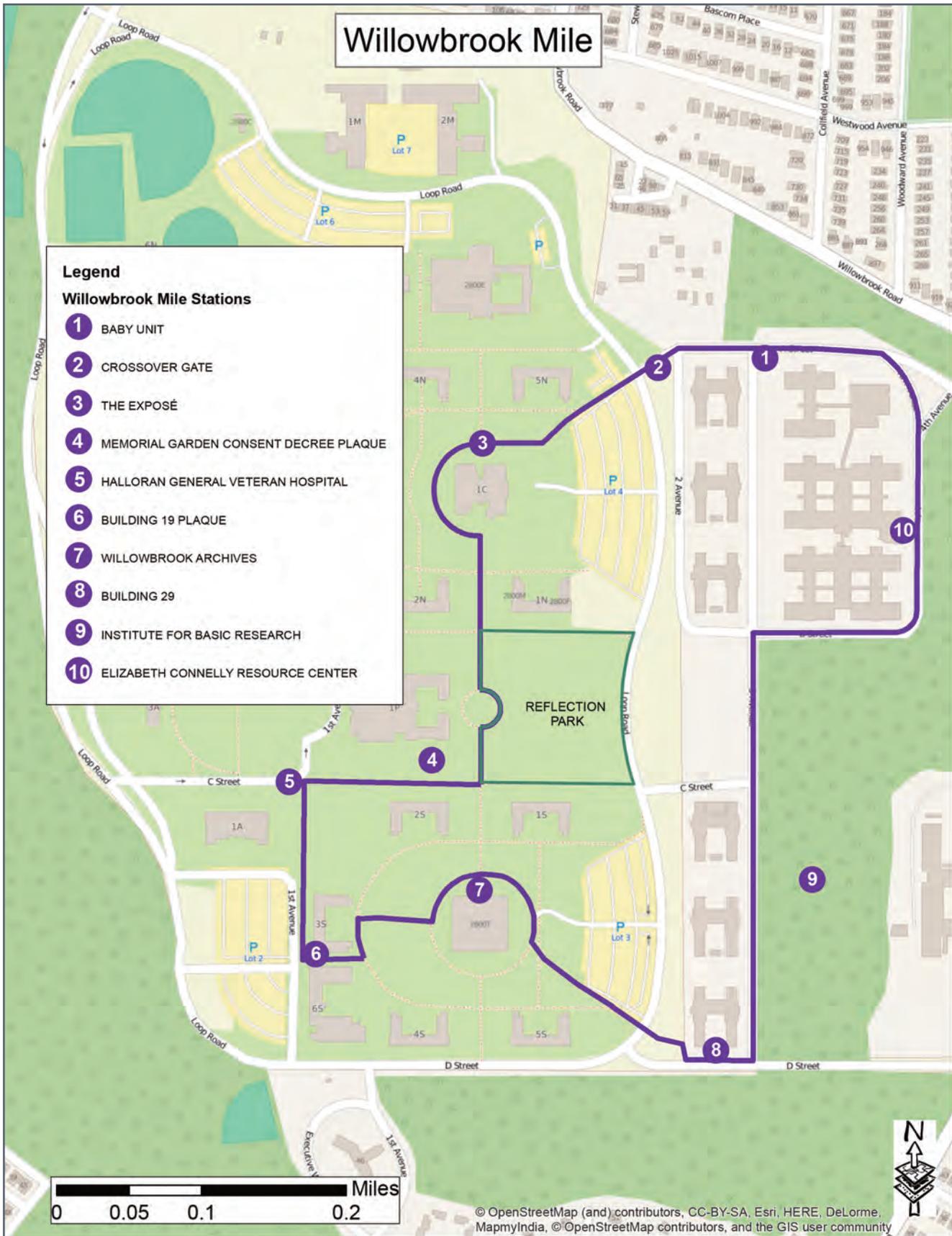
The Willowbrook Mile will unite with the CSI fitness path and eventually expand to include other existing Island trails, emblematic of our interconnectedness and ever-soaring human spirit to connect and thrive.

Willowbrook Mile

Legend

Willowbrook Mile Stations

- 1 BABY UNIT
- 2 CROSSOVER GATE
- 3 THE EXPOSÉ
- 4 MEMORIAL GARDEN CONSENT DECREE PLAQUE
- 5 HALLORAN GENERAL VETERAN HOSPITAL
- 6 BUILDING 19 PLAQUE
- 7 WILLOWBROOK ARCHIVES
- 8 BUILDING 29
- 9 INSTITUTE FOR BASIC RESEARCH
- 10 ELIZABETH CONNELLY RESOURCE CENTER



The Willowbrook Mile Commemorative Stations 1 – 10

STATION	NAME	<i>Never forget . . . never again.</i>
1	“Baby Unit”	This complex was built in 1960 specifically for infants and children. Institutionalization was routinely recommended in those years by the medical community. Families agonized over the decision to place their babies in such large facilities where more than 50 children were cared for by one or two attendants in large, impersonal ward settings. The decision to institutionalize began the child’s and the family’s long desperate journey.
2	“Crossover Gate”	Opening a Path – This gate symbolizes the crossover from institutionalization and isolation to integration into society for people with disabilities. Through this crossover, the property began to transition from acreage that once stifled growth to one that offered an enriched life with hope and opportunities.
3	“The Exposé”	This station tracks the journey of the exposure of the Willowbrook experience to public scrutiny. The Robert Kennedy visit in 1965, the <i>Staten Island Advance</i> series of articles depicting the poor conditions, and then finally the ABC News exposé led by journalist Geraldo Rivera, who mounted an explosive and realistic investigation into the conditions that were plagued by understaffing, overcrowding, and the cold, stark, inhuman institutional setting.
4	“Memorial Garden Consent Decree Plaque”	This plaque commemorates the closing of the Willowbrook State School. This closure was brought about by the 1975 Willowbrook Consent Judgment, which mandated the placement of Willowbrook residents in the community. Further, the Judgment required an array of services to be available in the community leading to more normalized, non-segregated care for people with special needs. This shift to the community from institutionalized care was paramount in the civil rights movement for people with special needs.
5	“Halloran General Veteran Hospital”	During WWII, Halloran was the largest Army hospital in the U.S. At the War’s end, it became a veteran’s hospital. In 1951, the hospital closed and the property was returned to the State for its original purpose as a “school” for individuals with mental retardation and other disabilities.
6	“Building 19 Plaque”	Willowbrook was a large institution covering more than 380 acres. The central plant provided heat and electricity to all of the buildings connected by steam tunnels. The mere scope and size of the facility seriously impaired its ability to provide normal, personalized comfort and care. This plaque honors every person who resided in these impersonal dormitory-style buildings. The buildings lacked basic personal and privacy considerations. Nearly 200 men lived in this building, when its original design was for fewer than 100 people. The faded painted Building Number 19 sign is preserved as a respectful remembrance.
7	“Willowbrook Archives”	A Collection of Historical Documents/Artifacts-which captures the experiences of the residents, their guardians, and Willowbrook staff members. Also included are historical documents related to the construction of the site.
8	“Building 29”	This building remains in an unimproved state from nearly 40 years ago. Specifically, this building housed people whose families had originally lived on Staten Island. Visual examples of institutional life, as well as an interactive media presentation to denote the strides in the field of developmental disabilities, are proposed to be housed here.
9	“The Institute for Basic Research in Developmental Disabilities (IBR)”	With the opening of its first research laboratories in 1968, The Institute for Basic Research in Developmental Disabilities (IBR) became the first large-scale institute in the world with a specific mandate to conduct basic and clinical research into the causes, treatment, and prevention of developmental disabilities. The rights of all individuals who participate in IBR’s research studies are protected to the utmost. In contrast, the rights of some Willowbrook residents who participated in research were violated. As a result of reforms initiated in response to research such as the Hepatitis Studies conducted at Willowbrook and other studies in the United States, and indeed, the world, today’s concept of informed consent protects the human rights of research subjects with very strict guidelines.
10	“Elizabeth Connelly Resource Center”	This station commemorates the Assemblywoman’s outstanding advocacy for people with disabilities. It discusses the need for sustained advocacy and constant vigilance to ensure that people with disabilities continue to receive the opportunities needed to lead lives of value and worth. This station addresses the challenge to sustain a person’s value through the actions of the society in which they live.

Once people leave the Mile, it is hoped that they will now be more keenly aware of not only the struggle but also the results of the advocacy efforts over so many years.

The Willowbrook Mile Collaboration

The Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Council, the College of Staten Island, the Institute for Basic Research in Developmental Disabilities, and the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities have formed a community partnership to memorialize the former site of the Willowbrook State School, which was located on the contiguous 383 acres on which these institutions currently reside. The Willowbrook Mile project aims to preserve the site's history and create a visionary presence that commemorates the deinstitutionalization movement and the progress of all people's right to live and thrive in their communities.

The Willowbrook Mile Collaborators:

Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Council (SIDDC) Willowbrook Property Planning Committee

Diane M. Buglioli
Co-Chairperson
Deputy Executive Director, A Very Special Place, Inc.

Lorraine De Santis
Co-Chairperson
Executive Director, Staten Island Center for Independent Living

College of Staten Island (CSI)

William J. Fritz
President

Michael E. Kress
Former Vice President for Information Technology and Economic Development

Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD)

Kerry A. Delaney
Acting Commissioner

Region 5 State Operations

Sheryl Minter-Brooks
Director

Institute for Basic Research in Developmental Disabilities (IBR)

W. Ted Brown, MD, PhD
Director

Special thanks to those who have given sustained direction and focus to this project:

Members of the Willowbrook Property Planning Committee of the Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Council, especially:

Lola Braisted
Peter Cheung
Linda Coull
Hall Kennedy
Maureen Marlow
Jackie Rumolo

Members of the College of Staten Island Willowbrook Mile Project Team

Elisa Csorba
Sandra Sanchez
Nora Santiago
Timothy Smolka
Ariana Zuberovic

PC Land Planners

Terri-Ann Hahn-Lada

Opportunities League of Hudson County

The Staten Island Chapter of The American Institute of Architects (AIA)

Timothy Boyland
Anselmo Genovese
Marcus Marino

State of New York Assemblyman

Michael Cusick





NEW YORK
STATE OF
OPPORTUNITY.

Office for People With
Developmental Disabilities



THE CITY UNIVERSITY
OF NEW YORK
**College of
Staten Island**