

# Search goes underground

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Beneath the sprawling Willowbrook estate of the Staten Island Developmental Center lies an underground maze of tunnels that a figure in the Jennifer Schweiger case was familiar with.

A transient who fits the description of the mildly retarded man seen walking with the missing 12-year-old Westerleigh girl just prior to her disappearance lived in a campsite he set up in the SIDC woods for at least the past few years. He also has figured in the investigation of the disappearances of three other Staten Island children.

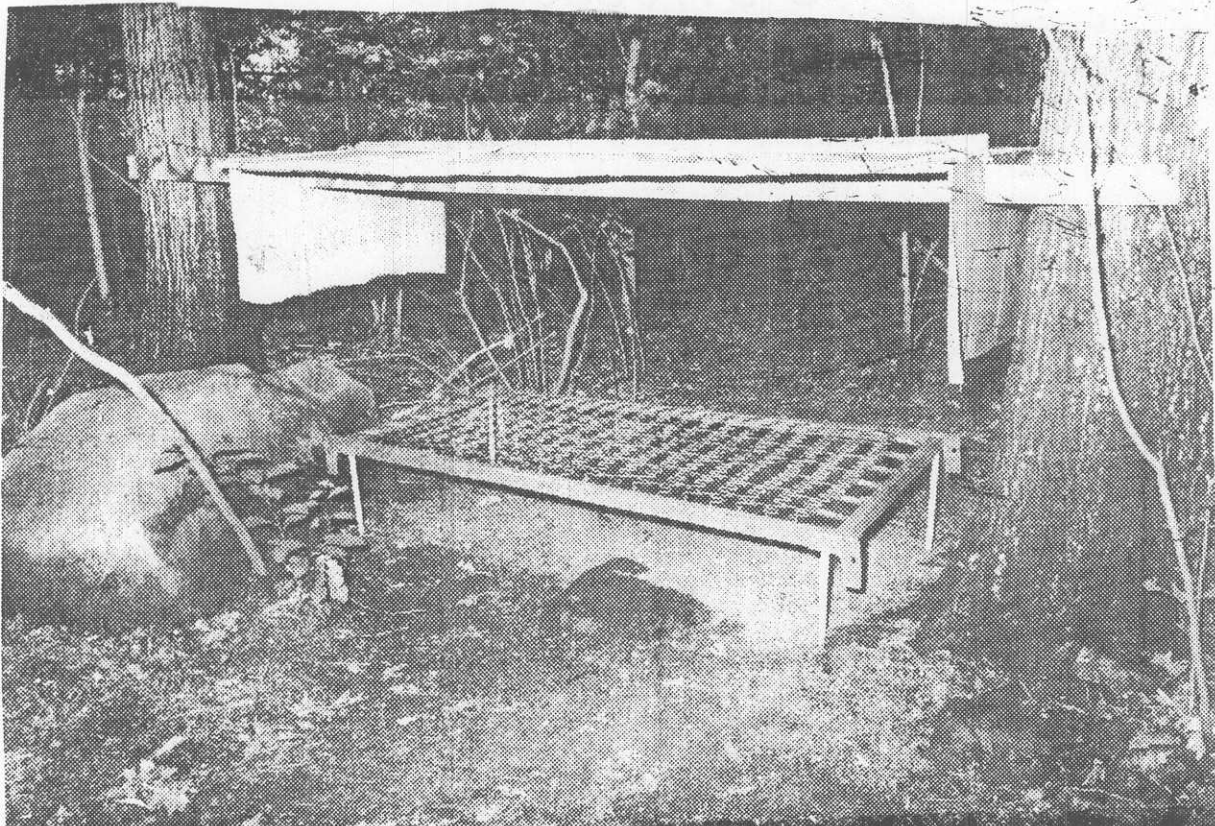
Police insist there is no evidence that a crime has been committed in connection with Jennifer's disappearance and publicly say no one is being singled out for investigation.

The transient who was questioned by police reportedly spent winters inside one of the abandoned kitchen buildings and worked at the center in the 1960s. He had access to a complex web of subterranean passageways that investigators have searched for the Down's syndrome child last seen July 9.

Back in the 1960s, when SIDC was the notorious Willowbrook State School, more than 6,000 mentally retarded patients were crammed into the facility meant for 4,500. There were two main kitchens each serving about eight buildings.

Each kitchen had underground hallways, like bicycle spokes, that reached the outer residence halls. Workers would wheel food trays to and from each dormitory. There are no walkways from

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ADVANCE PHOTO/TONY CARANWANTE

Police say that a transient they have questioned during their search for Jennifer Schweiger lived at this makeshift campsite on the grounds of the Staten Island Developmental Center.

to search yesterday.

The suspect has been questioned by detectives, who say they do not have him in custody and will not comment on where he is.

There was no evidence yesterday that he had returned to the campsite.

The man, described as about 60 years old, 5 feet 11 inches tall with a slim build and a bald spot on the back of his head, apparently had become just another a part of the scenery at the center. About 200 former SIDC clients still reside on the grounds.

venture into underground tunnels connecting buildings currently used by SIDC workers.

Police have cleared away his clothes and other belongings from the campsite, leaving only a metal bed frame between two trees, with overhead protection provided by a tarpaulin-covered board attached to the trees. Near the bed are a latrine hole and a foxhole several feet deep.

The campsite is hidden in the woods across from Building 27, one of the abandoned structures on the 382-acre spread that investigators and volunteers continued

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dorm to dorm, nor any connecting the two separate kitchen complexes.

However, there is a vast system of steam tunnels large enough to stand in, as well as sewer canals, that link all the buildings. Square and rectangular chimney-like vents scattered throughout the grounds provide entry to the steam maze several feet below ground. The suspect reportedly was familiar with access points to the walkways and both tunnel systems.

It is believed that he wouldn't

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