

1 man the link to missing girls?

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A common thread has been found in the disappearance of the 12-year-old Westerleigh girl with Down's syndrome who vanished 12 days ago and the disappearances of three other Staten Island children.

None of the children has ever been found, and, one man, a transient, has surfaced in each of the investigations.

The current police investigation involves a transient who police said matches the description of a man whom witnesses saw Jennifer Schweiger with. The same man has been "somehow placed in the area" prior to the disappearance of 7-year-old Holly Ann Hughes in July 1981 and that of 10-year-old Tiahease Jackson in August two years later, according to authorities.

As part of routine police procedure, police sought out a "bunch" of men who either matched the description of the man seen with Jennifer Schweiger the day she vanished or had histories of crimes against children.

The transient was in that group. Police had questioned the same transient at the time of Holly Ann's disappearance.

The suspected transient voluntarily agreed to be

interviewed early during the search for Jennifer, and remained with detectives for hours over a two-day period as teams of investigators "tried to break him," authorities said.

Investigators said that at this point there is no conclusive evidence that a crime has been committed in the disappearance of Jennifer and are maintaining publicly that no particular individual has been singled out in the case.

Tiahease Jackson disappeared while on a grocery errand for a neighbor near her home at the Conca D'Oro Motel in Mariners Harbor. After almost two weeks of intense searching, police ended the widespread hunt.

Holly Ann Hughes disappeared from in front of her Port Richmond home. Holly Ann's picture was placed on milk cartons distributed throughout the metropolitan area and the nation as part of a campaign to help locate 24 children believed to have been criminally abducted.

Investigators at the time of the disappearance expressed concern because a railroad overpass near Holly Ann's Park Avenue home was a gathering place for "drunks, drug users and derelicts," one of

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whom police said may have grabbed the girl.

Police mentioned a third missing-child case about 15 years ago that remains unsolved. They refused to give further details.

Police and volunteers continued to search yesterday for Jennifer, while her family and friends continued to hope she will be found.

Members of the girl's family and friends have put together a \$5,000 reward for information that leads to Jennifer's return, according to Donna Cutugno, a member of the girl's family and coordinator of the volunteer search effort.

"It was just decided," Ms. Cutugno said yesterday. "We are at our wits' end right now."

Volunteer groups continued forming, and yesterday searchers cleared debris from abandoned buildings on the grounds of Staten Island Developmental Center. According to the volunteer coordinator, mattresses, clothing and coolers filled with food were found in some of the buildings.

"We pulled 35 bags of garbage from one building," Ms. Cutugno said. "People were amazed at the stuff that was out there."

Searchers are hoping that by clearing out the buildings, any sign of Jennifer's movements will be easier to notice and track.

The Westerleigh girl disappeared July 9 while apparently on her way to a neighborhood store.

Since then, hundreds of Staten Island residents have joined the police and the National Guard to search for the child.

The girl, who has congenital heart disease and Down's syndrome, was last seen by witnesses who said she was walking with a mildly retarded 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.

There have been no confirmed sightings, although police receive calls every day.

Searchers found what may have been a smudge of blood in one of the buildings on the grounds of Staten Island Developmental Center over the weekend, and samples of the substance were sent for forensic study. Investigators expect the results of the tests some time today or tomorrow, according to Assistant Police Chief Samuel Marino, commander of the Island's police force.

Police exhausted their search of SIDC yesterday and shifted focus to peripheral areas, including parts of the Greenbelt and William H. Pouch Boy Scout Camp, Marino said.

"We have had flyovers and federal assistance," the borough commander said. "We have left literally no stone unturned."

The temporary police headquarters has been transferred from the Jewett Avenue firehouse to the 120th Precinct in St. George. The phone number — 447-4168 — remains the same.