





ou could call the Gateway rail tunnel construction a oncein-a-century undertaking, given that its predecessor tunnels were dug under the Hudson River over 100 years ago. The scope of the sprawling, bistate effort is surely monumental, encompassing 10 projects at five sites, 11,200 construction workers and a \$16 billion budget. Preliminary work includes riverbed reinforcement and the building of a new Route 1&9/Tonnelle Avenue bridge in North Bergen, above. "When it's done, we'll have four good-as-new tubes to serve for the next 100 years," says a Gateway Development Commission spokesperson. "Ten mega-projects will be made into one." See A4-5. Photos by Ed Murray, for The Star-Ledger

CAMDEN COUNTY

A teen's flight from 'house of horrors'

Escaping from years of alleged captivity, sex abuse, she faces uncertain future, experts say.

Riley Yates and Matthew Enuco For The Star-Ledger

The frantic teen came running to their house, banging on the door and desperate

Her head was shaved, she wore no shoes and her bulky sweatshirt hung from her body, several sizes too large. She hadn't bathed in weeks.

To 36-year-old Michael Lacey, she was a haunting sight, even before she began to pour out a tale of torture so stomach-churning that he wasn't sure what to believe.

For six years, the teen said, she had been held captive by her mother and stepfather, who pulled her from her Camden County school in 2019 after she finished sixth grade. She was chained to a toilet or confined to a dog crate, beaten and sexually abused, she said.

She's 18 years old, but talked like the child she was when she disappeared from the world all those years ago. She laughed oddly and out of place, giggling as she accused her stepfather of molesting her while he was drunk.

She was unrecognizable to Lacey She was his next-door neighbor.

"I gotta get away from there," the teen blurted to Lacey and his 75-year-old mother, who live together on a quiet street in Gloucester Township tucked not far

from a golf course. "Picture someone coming to you, not knowing anything about the world and asking a million questions," Lacey recounted in an interview. "That's exactly what she was doing. Exactly."

In May, after the teen's dramatic escape, authorities charged her mother, Brenda Spencer, and stepfather, Branndon Mosley, with crimes that include kidnapping,



Bars cover a window of the home in Gloucester Township that authorities said was the scene where a girl was abused for years. Matthew Enuco, for The Star-Ledger

aggravated assault and endangering the welfare of children. They could face life in prison if convicted.

If true, the accusations would make this a rare case of extreme child abuse, the kind that garners national attention and sparks conversations among onlookers who hope for a bright road ahead for a once-tormented child. But experts say the dash the teen took to Lacey's doorway on May 8 was just the beginning of a complicated path to an unknown future. What happens to kids who break away from upbringings so allegedly deplorable and inhumane?

It's an especially pressing question for the New Jersey teenager, who had already been the victim of sexual abuses committed by her birth father years before the new allegations came to light.

"I believe in children's resilience," said Priscilla Dass-Brailsford, a Georgetown University psychologist. "There is a potential for her to manage this, compartmentalize it in a healthy way. But that all can only SEE CAMDEN COUNTY, A8

HEALTH

Notoriety aside, ketamine praised as depression remedy

N.J. doctors among those calling on controversial drug to treat mental health issues.

Jackie Roman For The Star-Ledger

When Bridgette Mitchell is struggling with her depression and needs a little boost, she knows what to do.

She drives 20 minutes from her home in Tenafly to the Keta Medical Center in Oradell, sits in a reclining chair, slides on an eye mask, puts on some headphones, and waits for the dissociative effects of

ketamine to kick in. The treatments, which are covered by her insurance and are FDA-approved, are the only thing that really helps, Mitchell said.

"It just really changed my life," said Mitchell, 54. "I honestly don't know where I would be right now if I hadn't had this

Ketamine is more associated with sedating horses and party drug culture than mental health care.

But in recent years it's become increasingly popular for the treatment of psychiatric conditions, promoted by everyone from Elon Musk to the moms on "Secret Lives of Mormon Wives."

Patients and providers say it can be

life-changing, especially for those with treatment-resistant depression.

More than 500 ketamine clinics operate in the United States, with the market anticipated to value \$6.9 billion by 2030, according to market analysis firm Grand View Research. Over a dozen of them are right here in New Jersey.

However, a rise in overdose deaths involving the drug nationwide has raised concerns about its safety.

WHAT IS KETAMINE?

Ketamine was approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration in 1970 as a general anesthetic for humans SEE HEALTH, A12

INSIDE

Feds launch probe of Murphy's remarks

Federal authorities in President Donald Trump's administration are investigating controversial remarks Gov. Phil Murphy made earlier this year about housing a migrant, according to a report Friday by the New York Times. **A2**

SPORTS

A decisive win

Iga Swiatek wins her first Wimbledon championship with a 6-0, 6-0 victory over New Jersey native Amanda Anisimova. Saturday's victory gave Swiatek her sixth Grand Slam title overall. **E6**

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