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Abused kids relived pain in foster homes

By JEAN RIMBACH and LESLIE BRODY
STAFF WRITERS

The state ignored clear warning signs that some of the foster parents it paid to care for abused children did just the opposite — beating, raping, or neglecting them all over again, according to confidential records released Monday.

Files show DYFS ignored mistreatment

In one case, workers at the state Division of Youth and Family Services knew that three foster children were being abused but took a year to move them.

In another, DYFS paid a homeless man to serve as a foster father. When a witness caught him showering naked with

his foster daughter at a relative's house, he said he just wanted to wash her hair.

And in a third disturbing lapse, a Bogota foster mother routinely left a severely ill toddler alone wailing in his crib in a dark room. A home aide helping the family begged for a new job because watching

such treatment "breaks her heart." Still, DYFS left other foster children in the home for the nearly two years it took to investigate the neglect.

The roughly 2,000 pages of records released Monday document the lives of 17 children who were brutally punished, mo-

lest, or ignored — all but one in foster care. Four of them died.

These interoffice memos, caseworker reports, and witness statements were released by Children's Rights Inc., a national advocacy group that sued New Jersey four years ago in an attempt to force reforms. The group has been in settlement talks with the state.

See **DYFS** Page A-4

Curtain drops at Harms Center

Englewood theater can't pay off debt

By JIM BECKERMAN
STAFF WRITER

The John Harms Center for the Arts, which once resounded with the music of James Galway, Chick Corea, and Tony Bennett, is now silent.

Last-ditch weekend efforts to save the non-profit Englewood theater failed when its board of directors was unable to renegotiate a \$2.5 million debt owed to Fleet Bank.

In the theater lobby Monday afternoon, employees and volunteers stood in stunned silence as board President and Chairman Robert Stern, choking back tears, made the announcement.

"This really feels like the loss of a loved one," Stern said.

The theater's 25 full- and part-time employees were notified earlier in the day that their positions were terminated.

All 15 upcoming performances have been canceled, including such attractions as Tower of Power and Average White Band (April 23), David Sanborn (May 1), and Luma: Theater of Light (May 4).

Stern said a fund will be started to reimburse the \$100,000 in ticket sales for these canceled shows. But no plan is yet in place, and Stern asked that patrons be patient as the board attempts to deal with the debt.

The John Harms Performing Arts School, which serves 550 children, has also been closed, effective immediately.

The 24-member board has not yet been dissolved, but any hopes of reviving the theater are speculative. "We cannot embark on any plans without the debt being resolved," said board member Frank Huttler.

Steven Lubetkin, a spokesman for Fleet Bank, issued a statement saying the bank was "surprised and saddened" by the closing. "We've been in discussion with the theater for a number of months to try to restructure the finances and we believe we made a good faith effort to try to resolve this in a way that would keep the theater open," Lubetkin said.

The closing of the Harms center could have a devastating impact on the city's downtown, said Englewood Councilman Michael Wildes.

"I would shudder to think what Englewood would be like without the Harms," Wildes said. "I think it would have a terrible impact on the

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Tikrit in U.S. hands; 'major combat' over



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Shoppers crowding a market in Baghdad's Bayaa district Monday, as Iraqis try to get their lives back to normal. U.S. Marines stepped up security in the capital.

U.S. considering sanctions on Syria

Says nation aids terrorists

By BARRY SCHWEID
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Triumphant in Iraq, the Bush administration looked across the border to Syria on Monday, accusing it of harboring remnants of Saddam Hussein's government and supporting terrorism. Secretary of State Colin L. Powell raised the possibility of diplomatic and economic sanctions.

Sharpening the Bush administration's rhetoric, Powell said, "They should review their actions and their behavior, not only with respect to who gets haven in Syria and weapons of mass destruction, but especially the support of terrorist activity."

National security adviser Condoleezza Rice, in a parallel thrust at Damascus, said Syria's support for terrorism

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WAR COVERAGE



■ Army Spec. Gil Mercado Jr., 25, of Paterson dies in Iraq in 'non-combat weapons discharge.' **A-7**

■ Meeting today on Iraq's future shadowed by controversy over U.S. choice for interim leader. **A-8**

■ A look inside the palace and the opulent lifestyle of Hussein's son Oudai. **A-8**

■ Countries with likely weapons of mass destruction include U.S. allies. **A-9**

Postwar leadership talks to open today

By DAVID ESPO
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit fell with unexpectedly light resistance Monday, the last Iraqi city to succumb to overpowering U.S.-led ground and air forces. A senior Pentagon general said "major combat engagements" are likely over in the 26-day war.

As fighting wound down, Pentagon officials disclosed plans to pull two aircraft carriers from the Persian Gulf. At the same time, Iraqi power brokers looked ahead to discussions on a postwar government at a U.S.-arranged meeting set for today.

"I would anticipate that the major combat engagements are over," Maj. Gen. Stanley McChrystal told reporters at the Pentagon. Tikrit fell with no sign of the ferocious last stand by Hussein loyalists that some military planners had feared.

Secretary of State Colin L. Powell hinted at economic or diplomatic sanctions against Syria, saying the government is developing a weapons of mass destruction program and helping Iraqis flee the dying regime. Syrian officials denied the charges.

Looting eased in Baghdad after days of plundering at government

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INSIDE

■ NJ Transit promises plan in six months to bring passenger rail service to Meadowlands. **A-3**

■ China expresses deep concerns about SARS outbreak as global death toll tops 140. **A-5**

■ Menendez says McGreevey, a fellow Democrat, is taking the Hispanic community for granted. **L-8**

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Human gene code nearly solved

By PAUL RECER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The book of genetic instructions for the human body is complete to an accuracy of 99.99 percent, a scientific achievement once deemed impossible but now considered the foundation for a new era of medical advances, an international research team said Monday.

With the entire sequence in hand and available to scientists

Six nations hail medical potential

worldwide, experts predict it will lead to new drugs, better forecasts of people's health, and new ways to treat or prevent many of the most devastating human illnesses.

A joint statement from the leaders of the six nations, including President Bush, said the genetic map "provides us with the funda-

mental platform for understanding ourselves from which revolutionary progress will be made in biomedical sciences and in the health and welfare of humankind."

The group, along with a competing private effort, completed a rough draft of the genome in 2000, but that draft included thousands of gaps in the long sequence of DNA base pairs. Now all but 400 of those gaps have been closed.

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