## CYO satellite office seeks to cool the heat on Genesee Street

When Wanda Cowart says it's going to be a long, hot summer, she's not talking about the weather. She is talking about the friction between Genesee Street youths, police, residents and business owners.

Already this season, 14 youths have been arrested Wanda Cowart for attacking a police car in the neighborhood, and police report a resurgence of gang activity, particularly in Rochester's northeast and

southwest areas. Cowart, project coordinator for the Catholic Youth Organization's new southwest satellite office, believes people have over-reacted to youths hanging out on Genesee Street. Some business owners have complained, she said, but the strongest reactions have come from people from outside the area who were passing

"There are more kids this summer," she acknowledged, "but the majority are just hanging out, not causing trouble. They don't have anywhere to go."

Cowart is not sure of the reasons for the trouble, but believes that a 40-percent unemployment rate among black teen-agers may have something to do with it.

Through its new satellite office, the CYO and Cowart are working to find young people jobs to keep them from becoming involved in vandalism and violence.

"Kids want something to do. They need a release in the summertime," Cowart said. 'We're trying to bridge the gap between kids and businesses in the area. There are jobs here that no one has touched." She offered Strong Memorial and St. Mary's hospitals, and Olympic Amusement Park as examples of potential job sites.

Some employers claim that young people don't want to work for minimum wages anymore, Cowart said, adding that such charges are true - in part.

"They don't want to, but they will," she said. "Especially if you're 14 or 15, you're lucky to find a job. There are people (laid-off) from Kodak working for minimum wage."

Beyond searching for summer jobs, Cowart wants to help young people assess their longterm goals. "They want jobs, but what they might need is to continue their education or job preparation," she said. "I can get them jobs at Burger King and McDonald's, but that's not going to make them happy for long?"

So she bargains with dropouts and potential dropouts, telling them "I'll get you a job if you finish school somehow?"



Jeff Goulding/Cour

Most of the young people who frequent Genesee Street in the summer are looking for something to do, not for trouble, according to Wanda Cowart, project coordinator of the CYO's Southwest Satellite Office. She hopes to satisfy some of their needs with job referrals, workshops and counseling.

Funded this year by the City of Rochester and the United Way, the CYO's southwest satellite office at 500 Genesee Street opened April 1. Since then, 76 young people between the ages of 14 and 25 have contacted Cowart.

The first was Eric Armstrong, 24. Fired from his last job in April, he lost his apartment in the 19th Ward and moved in with his family on Joseph Avenue. "I'm looking for anything that comes along - cleaning up, maintenance or outside work," he said. "That's what I'd really like to do. But so far, it's been two weeks, and nothing's come up yet."

Meanwhile, he continues to fill out applications and make phone calls. "I'm not discouraged," he said. "You just have to keep trying."

Armstrong's prospects may well be better than those of young people going it alone. "A person applying for a job has a better chance going through the CYO," Cowart explained. "It's one of the largest employment agencies for youth. People automatically associate it with service for youth."

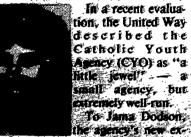
Yet, with only Cowart and a part-time secretary on staff, the CYO southwest office can provide few direct services, relying on referrals to other agencies. But Cowart sees plenty of room for growth. "I see it expanding to do way above what the program is doing now," she said. In the fall, the office will sponsor a series of workshops with representatives of area businesses talking to youth about careers.

Cowart also plans to offer youths and their parents workshops on communication, career choices and job-hunting skills. "You find a lot of parents are busy because they're working. But we want to stress that they need to spend time with their kids," she said.

Eventually, she hopes to increase the office's staff to include a job developer and employ-. ment, personal and vocational counselors.

**Continued on Page 15** 

## CYC executive strives to end group's identity easist



Jame Dodgon - ecutive - director, that's high praise indeed. At 13, she has devoted most of her career to the often thankless task of program administra-

"I don't get a lot of featback; but t here I can do more for like by making. 

As the CYO's program director for youth employment services for the past four years, Dodson wrote grants and helped develop such programs as the CYO Southwest Satellite Office and the Hispanic Youth Employment Program. Last March, she was named acting

executive director of the CYO, replacing Joyce Strazzabosco, who left to become president and chief executive officer of the Hemophilia Center. Three months later. Dodson was appointed executive director.

She inherits an agency that hus transcended a lingering image as a sports and recreation program for mostly white middle-class Catholic youther The great began back in 1976/77/ when Cotton in content to some

Hispanic Fonts Emplo resource referral network (the Job

Although few actual changes were made in day-to-day operations. Dodson notes the CYO was also aught up in

the renewal of the diocesan Division of Social Ministry. Along with the rest of the CYO staff, she has devoted considerable time and energy to that transition for the past few years. Nevertheless, with the help of more than 200 parent. base voluntees; the sacrey's 13th fulltime, and two part-time staff had year served more than 9,000 individuals.

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serve all youth. There are on portunities for kids willing and mature enough to work. We try to let young people know there are many many things out there they can do and serve as intermediaries for them.

"We respect kids and believe they have a lot to offer if it's asked of them,' she added.

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