

CONCERNED CITIZENS

# Stopping youth violence focus of residents' efforts

By Keith Roberts

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For months, Kathleen Conley heard gunshots from her downtown Jackson home.

Then in December, a 19-year-old Jackson man was shot on Maple Street and died at Allegiance Health.

"All of those shootings this summer, and now this young man," said Conley, chairwoman of the Jackson Human Relations Commission. "I didn't cause it to happen, but I didn't do anything to stop it."

Conley decided to start a group of citizens concerned about youth violence — she doesn't have a name for

## First meeting

The first meeting of a group of citizens concerned about youth violence in Jackson will be at 6:30 p.m. Jan. 28 at Martin Luther King Center, 1107 Adrian St. For more information, call 745-0045.

it yet — and is holding the first meeting Jan. 28.

"We need to organize a community response to ensure our city and its residents are safe," Conley wrote in an e-mail inviting people to the meeting.

"The solution we will work toward is creating a neighborhood plan to ensure safety for residents that will in turn prevent youth from being targets or perpetrators of violent acts."

Conley said she is just a concerned citizen now, but she plans to ask the IHRC to help get the group going. Ultimately the group should be independent, she believes.

Conley said she didn't know if the Partnership Park model could be expanded to other areas in the city, but she is willing to consider it.

Jon Hart, a community organizer with the Community Action Agency, said some Partnership Park programs would work elsewhere in the city,

but every neighborhood has its own issues and should have its own programs.

Hart said he thinks the group should focus on middle school students because most programs designed to discourage criminal or gang activity are geared toward high school students, and by then, it's often too late. He also said mentoring programs for at-risk youth have proven effective.

Hart said he plans to be a part of the group and believes it can be part of the solution to youth violence.

"It's a community problem. We're all part of the community," Hart said. "We've got to look it in the face and deal with it."