

# Eye opener

## Homeless offer rare insight

By Casey Hans  
staff writer

**T**HEY WERE immediately drawn to the underweight children with longing in their eyes. Pairs of tiny arms gripped, hugged and held on tightly.

The visitors viewed the impoverished scene as a noon meal of pigs feet was prepared.

"I like children a lot; there were

a lot of children," Jennifer Geach said. "There was one who threw her arms around my neck and would not let go. It was nothing like I'd imagined it would be."

Geach was part of an 8-member teenage youth group from Antioch Lutheran Church in Farmington Hills that spent a weekend in Detroit and visited St. John's Community Center.

Their spring visit to the center for the hungry and homeless gave

the group a new look at life and touched each teen's life.

"We played with some of the kids who were starved for attention," said another teen, Jennifer Young. "It was a lot worse than I thought it would be."

THE CYCLE of poverty that moves from generation to generation was seen in the population at the center, which ranged from 3 months to 70 years of age. The shelter can house up to 35 people, who are allowed to stay no longer than five days.

The children's plight was the most noticeable.

"The kids were the saddest part," said Lisa Gull, who penned a feature article about the group's experiences for the North Farmington High School newspaper. "It's really hard for them to get out of it."

The weekend visit prompted the students to "adopt" a family who had just arrived from Arkansas. Several times each week, youth group member Scott Schroeder and several others visit members of the family, who now have an apartment on Jefferson.

THE GROUP held a bake sale, raising enough money to buy a car for the family. The Antioch parish is supportive as well.

"They were kind of worn down and beat," Schroeder said about the family. "They had been tossed around by Social Services. They really didn't want to ask (for help)."

"All we did was bake brownies — they told their neighbors it was a miracle. They're looking for a future where they can find one."

A donation of a television set helped the family's two teenagers stay out of trouble.

"There's nothing to do but get into trouble down there," Schroeder added. "Everyone you meet, you're uncertain of."

Another group of students worked at a Detroit soup kitchen during their visit to the city, said Leslie Parks, who coordinates the youth group. "Their experience was different."

Those interested in helping the Antioch youth group with their mission can contact Parks at 626-7906.



Youth group member Jennifer Geach said my neck and would not let go. It was nothing one child in Detroit "threw her arms around like I'd imagined it would be."



Lisa Gull wrote about the youth group's experiences visiting the hungry and homeless for the North Farmington High newspaper.



Scott Schroeder and other members of a youth group affiliated with Antioch Lutheran Church in Farmington Hills often visit an Arkansas family that now lives on Jefferson in Detroit.

Staff photos  
by  
Randy Borst



Christmas Around the World staff members Linda Lewis (left) of Livonia and Karen Cox of Farmington are shown with Cox's daughters, Tara (left), 6, and Brooke, 5.

# Balancing act

## Women mix business, child rearing

By Casey Hans  
staff writer

It's a home-style business that could easily be anybody's "home sweet home."

Children play among the offices while their mothers book appointments and take care of business. The offices are filled with Christmas decorations that twinkle and beckon to buyers year-round.

A national home-party sales business with regional offices in Farmington, Christmas Around the World has given local women a chance to be with their children, have a career, and make money they only dreamed about with a job requiring several months per year.

The five district managers and regional manager who work from the office in the old Farmington winery building are all in their mid-30s. They have 17 children between them. The managers hail from a variety of areas, including Farmington, Livonia, Southfield, and Garden City. All are welcome to bring their children to the office, where flexibility has become the rule.

"I THINK as mothers, we feel we have the best of both worlds," said

**"There's nothing else I can do and make this kind of money and be with my kids."**

— Karen Cox  
Farmington

my kids," she said.

Not only has the company helped to boost the careers of area women, but several charitable organizations have benefited as well.

Organizations such as the Farmington Area Goodfellows receive several thousand dollars each year in merchandise donated by Christmas Around the World's local office.

EMPLOYEES OF all-female operation say they share experiences, help each other, and even give away home parties to other districts when they're overbooked. "That's the way we all work together," Cox said. "It's not the 'American way.'"

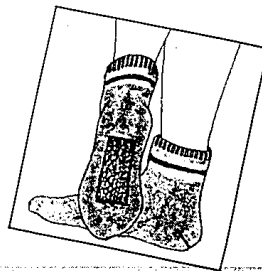
There are no corporate politics to dampen spirits at this holiday outfit, despite some setbacks encountered by the young company.

Following a computer crash at the company's home office in Kansas City last year — which left 200 Michigan orders unfilled and brought some unwanted publicity to the company — things are back on track, the employees in Farmington said. The company has purchased a new computer system, and many hostesses are again planning parties.

Farmington resident Karen Cox, regional manager for the company, which has grown from \$9 million to \$180 million in sales in its few years of existence. Last year, \$10 million of those sales were logged in the state of Michigan.

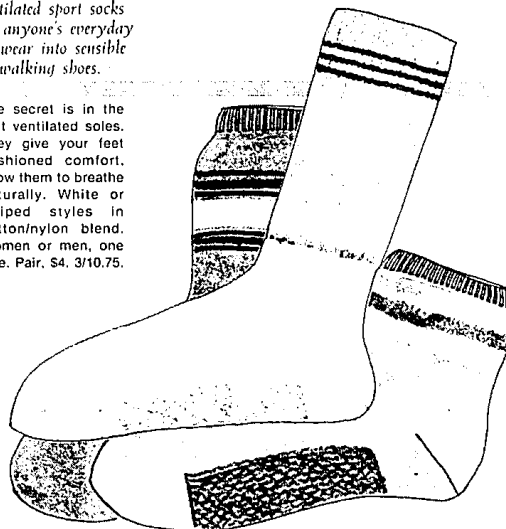
Cox worked from her home for the first two years. She then rented office space in Farmington this year. "There's nothing else I can do and make this kind of money and be with

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