

Art program leader helps teens understand their communities

50 PEOPLE WHO MAKE CHICAGO A BETTER PLACE

Before the teens worked on a mural at Barrett Park in Pilsen, Vanessa Sanchez made sure they visited the neighborhood to get to know the people who live there and the issues they face. Before they did a mural for St. Anthony Hospital near Douglas Park, she made sure they went inside and learned about the hospital and the community it served.

As youth programs projects manager for Yollocalli, an art appreciation and career training program run by the National Museum of Mexican Art, Sanchez' job is not only to encourage teens to explore ideas through art, but to use art to get to know their communities better — as well as themselves.

“We want them to not just understand art, but to think



Vanessa Sanchez strives to encourage young people to explore ideas through art while getting to know more about their communities and themselves. | JEAN LACHAT-SUN-TIMES

about it in a different way,” said Sanchez, 26, of Pilsen. “It gives them a way to talk about their own identity and culture.”

Sanchez, a graduate of the program, has done classes on examining stereotypes about Latino and African-American youth and programs on gentrifica-

tion and gang violence.

Part of the purpose of the program, which is run out of the Yollocalli studio at 1401 W. 18th as well as some satellite centers, is to give students “a place to come and get away from the area,” said Sanchez, a graduate of Whitney Young High School and the University of

Illinois at Chicago.

Many of the students, ages 13 to 21, who take the free daily classes truly “want to make a difference in the community,” she said.

Dave Newbart

**COMING FRIDAY
NO. 33**