

BOY, 14, SAYS DRUG DEBT LED TO SLAYING

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Elizabeth Alvarez, a mother of three children stretching to make ends meet on Detroit's southwest side, knew the value of hard-earned money.

But she had a generous heart for children whether they were her own or other kids from the neighborhood. Tuesday afternoon, she stopped at an automatic teller machine on West Fort near Junction to withdraw four \$20 bills to celebrate her daughter Melissa's 14th birthday.

There Alvarez was shot to death, allegedly while struggling over her \$80 with a 14-year-old boy who had run away from his abusive family to hustle **drugs** on the street.

Law enforcement officials said the youth, Damien Dorris, owed \$430 to two men for whom he sold crack cocaine. Dorris, known as Red on the street, told police he wanted to stop selling crack but the men threatened to kill him if he didn't come up with the cash, the officials said.

Dorris and three younger boys were arrested late Tuesday and Wednesday in Alvarez's death. Two of the boys, an 8-year-old nicknamed Little Bit and an 11-year-old, were released Wednesday after the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office decided not to charge them. The boys can be called as witnesses, authorities said.

Dorris faces a probable cause hearing in Wayne County Juvenile Court on Aug. 31 on charges of first-degree murder, armed robbery, conspiracy and possession of a firearm. He is too young to be tried as an adult and if convicted could be held only until age 21.

An 11-year-old boy known as J also was arrested Wednesday and may be charged later.

Dorris, a 7th grade student, told police he didn't mean to shoot the woman, whom he did not know. He said that while he tugged at the money in her hand she resisted and the gun went off, striking her in the left cheek.

The .22 caliber bullet went through Alvarez's head. She died at Detroit Receiving Hospital.

Dorris told police he got the gun from the attic of a friend's house where he had been staying.

Police said much of the incident was captured on videotape by a camera at the ATM booth, and several witnesses saw the broad-daylight robbery.

Dorris told police he lost most of the money running away from the scene and he later gave \$3 to Little Bit, \$20 to J, and \$5 to the other 11-year-old. He said he spent \$10 for food.

"It's just so ironic" that children are charged in her death, said Alvarez's sister, Stephanie Gadwell. "She just loved children so much. She always did something special for kids."

In addition to Melissa, Alvarez was the mother of 3-year-old Lisa and 2-year-old Anthony, and was three months pregnant. Relatives said she was happy and always kind to scores of children from her neighborhood and family.

"She was on ADC and she saved coupons," Gadwell said. "She was always pinching pennies. She was a miser."

Alvarez was separated from her husband and in the process of getting a divorce.

When she moved into her apartment on Keller in the Delray neighborhood this summer, one of her first projects was to clear a vacant lot of debris so children could play there. She baked chocolate chip cookies and had pizza parties for the kids who flocked to her home. She took them to the beach, to the wave pool, the mall and the movies.

During Fourth of July celebrations, "every year she goes out and buys \$100 worth of fireworks," Melissa said of her mother. "She knows a lot of kids down here don't have that much. She just wanted to help out. She was always looking out for people."

Dorris told police he hardly ever sees his father and that he ran away from his mother about two months ago. "I left 'cause she hits me too much," he said in a police statement.

The boy's mother, Jacqueline Dorris, and his father, Earl Murphy, appeared at Wednesday's hearing but had no comment for reporters.

Dorris told investigators he had been "rolling" -- selling crack cocaine -- for two men he knew only as CC and WT for the past month. His older brother, who is 16, owes \$1,000 to the dope dealers, Dorris said in a police statement.

Police said all the youths arrested knew that Dorris was planning to rob someone, but not all of them participated. The 11-year-old who was released from custody was spotted by his parents on the street shortly before the robbery and was taken home, the police report said.

Relatives of the other boys described them as wayward kids with troubled parents. The grandmother of one of the 11-year-olds said he had been "doing wrong things" and was part of a **gang**. "I don't blame him much. I blame his parents. My son just left. I told him, 'It's your fault,' " she said, referring to the boy's father.

Renee Wesley, Alvarez's 22-year-old niece, attended court hearings for the boys Wednesday and shed tears of anger afterward.

"They were all in this together," Wesley told reporters, saying she was upset two of the children were released. "Whatever the most they can get, give them the most. . . . I can't believe it -- 8, 11, 14 -- they should be playing in the pool or playing ball, not talking about robbing somebody."

"I feel sorry for them," Wesley said. "It's not their fault. It's their upbringing."

Caption: Photo Color JOHN LUKE; DAYMON J. HARTLEY; Map

: Damien Dorris, 14, heads into a preliminary hearing Wednesday in Wayne County Juvenile Court. Melissa Alvarez, 14, center, holds her brother Anthony, 2, and puts her arm around her sister Lisa, 3, on the porch of their aunt's house Wednesday. Their mother was robbed and shot to death Tuesday at an ATM.

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