

# CBA Lawyers Mentor City's Youth

By Linda M. Rio

One-on-one mentoring between adults and disadvantaged youths provides critical support for the success of at-risk young people. The Chicago Bar Association, including the Young Lawyers Section and the Chicago Bar Foundation, have a long-standing commitment to strengthening and supporting families. A natural outgrowth of that commitment has been a multi-faceted program to support mentor and tutor programs.

## Mentor/Tutor Program Brokering

Chicago has over 200 programs delivering various kinds of mentoring to inner city children. All of these programs need additional adults willing to devote their time and energy as mentors or tutors. For over a year, the CBA and CBF have assisted the Tutor/Mentor Connection, Chicago's clearinghouse for mentor and tutor programs in recruiting volunteers and new sources of funding. (See description of some programs at the end of this article.) Along the way, we have gathered and shared information on the strengths and weaknesses of tutor/mentor programs, so that other programs may learn from those that have succeeded.

Over 400 people have contacted us for referrals to neighborhood programs or to volunteer for our own "in-house" projects.



## How You Can Become A Mentor, Too

For each in-house project, training is created to better equip adults to serve as mentors. In 1993 the CBF trained 56 persons to be mentors in the Juvenile Court One-on-One Program and other mentor programs; since then, the CBA, CBF and YLS have trained almost 100 persons to serve as tutors for our in-house programs.

Now the CBA and CBF are about to link the legal community to mentor and tutor programs in yet another way. Entitled the "Law Bridges" program, we will recruit and train 25 legal teams of lawyers, legal assistants, legal secretaries and other legal staff to attend 25 existing mentor or tutor programs on a monthly basis. The legal teams will engage in discussions with the youth in these programs about law-related careers and legal issues of importance to the youth. We hope to include teams from all aspects of the legal community, including private practice, legal services, the courts and the legislative branch. The CBA and CBF will offer training and ongoing support to these much-needed teams.

## Tutor/Mentor Week

In November, a city-wide Tutor/Mentor Week will provide a big opportunity to get the word out about the need for additional contributions of time and money to mentoring efforts. The week will begin on November 6 and include media coverage of some of the wonderful success stories that have come from many mentor-youth relationships. CBA President René A. Torrado, Jr. and CBF President Thomas Morsch will

host a breakfast for corporations and law firms to focus on the difference that corporate programs can make. The week will culminate with a Tutor/Mentor Leadership Conference on November 10 and 11 hosted by the Tutor/Mentor Connection. This conference will give aspiring programs the tools they need to establish successful agendas and will offer many ideas for strengthening existing programs.

The CBA, through the leadership of Immediate Past President Richard J. Prendergast, established the CBA Mentor Advisory

Board to support expansion of our mentoring efforts. The Board members — Donald Hubert (Co-Chair), Reverend Thomas Paprocki (Co-Chair), Daniel Bassill, Thomas Demetrio, Betsy Densmore, Thomas Donnelly, Jann Dragovich, Leonard Gail, Judge Sophia Hall, James Morsch and Linda Rio — were selected because of their past experience in working with such programs.

## In-House Tutoring Programs

The Chicago Bar Association not only supports existing mentor and tutor programs, but also has created two tutoring programs of its own. All volunteers for these programs come from the Chicago legal community; most are lawyers. Although they come from various practice areas and environments, they share a commitment to improving the lives of disadvantaged children. These legal professionals *make* the time each week to tutor children who need all the academic support they can get.

The YLS began a tutoring program for foster-care youth in 1993. We started with 20 boys, ages 10-15, from the Lawrence Hall Youth Center foster care group homes. Today the Lawrence Hall Tutoring Program is coordinated through the YLS by Alison Paul of Wilson & McIlvaine. There are almost 60 volunteer attorneys in the program, who each tutor one night per week. The program recently expanded to include tutoring girls in the Lawrence Hall system. A few more tutors are needed to work with the girls during the Monday night tutoring session.

(Continued On Page 14)

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