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## Volunteers connect with students through tutoring program

By Gina McIntyre

Encouraging residents across the city to turn their energies toward a common goal — helping Chicago's disadvantaged youth to excel scholastically — is the key to the Tutor/Mentor Connection, a not-for-profit organization founded in 1993 by Daniel Bassill.

In 1975, three years after he moved to Chicago to become an advertising copywriter, Bassill assumed leadership of a tutoring/mentoring program for students living in Cabrini-Green. While acting as director, he realized the importance of working with similar organizations and educating the surrounding community about programs and volunteer opportunities.

"The need for the T/MC came from past tutoring experience. As we continued to build our own program, we began to get calls from people all over the country. We needed to find ways to help those groups and start those programs, and part of it is organizing a citywide campaign that encourages more individuals to say, 'I can get involved,'" he said.

Commitment is the quality most vital to a successful volunteer, Bassill said. "The real key is the philosophy. This is not easy. Volunteers come in with a lot of different expectations, but it's that understanding that says, 'I'm going to help this kid succeed.'"

Working in the Schools (WITS), 150 E. Huron St., is one of the not-for-profit agencies participating in an upcoming volunteer recruitment fair. The agency dispatches approximately 200 volunteers from across the city into five grade schools primarily serving the children of Cabrini-Green — Richard E. Byrd, 363 W. Hill St., Edward Jenner, 1009 N. Cleveland Ave., George Manierre, 1420 N. Hudson Ave., Friedrich Von Schiller, 640 W. Scott St., and Sojourner Truth, 1443 N. Ogden Ave.

According to Associate Director Jennifer Kunde, WITS recruits and trains volunteers, busing them into the schools two days a week to assist teachers and students in a variety of ways. "They need to be willing to tutor, [while]

working with the teachers or working one-on-one with students on reading, math and science," she said.

Students' interaction with the volunteers is positive, she said. "In terms of self-esteem and the general lifting of these kids' spirits, it's enriching their lives, in a way, by bringing in people. They're meeting people who have held jobs and are stable, so it's not something they're used to seeing. It can only help, and the kids really love it."



Students who participate in the Tutor/Mentor Connection program benefit from interacting with volunteers. Pictured is a volunteer with some T/MC students.

The program is equally rewarding for adults, said WITS volunteer Mary Ellen Guest.

Guest began working with the program in December 1995 as part of EVERON Securities, Inc.'s "Corporate Release Time," program. She and 20 other volunteers left their desks eight hours a month last semester to tutor 2nd-graders, most of whom attended Jenner.

"We provide love and affection for the kids and give them extra help, but we get way more than we give. There's a sense of one person trying to make things better, and I look forward to going back next year. It's been wonderful. This is something I really believe in," Guest said.

Just in time for the back-to-school crunch, Bassill has organized a volunteer recruitment

campaign, "What a Difference a Day Makes," Friday and Saturday, September 6-7. The campaign includes fairs at seven locations citywide, including the Chicago Cultural Center, 78 E. Washington St., Borders Books & Music, 830 N. Michigan Ave. and DePaul University's Schmitt Academic Center, 2320 N. Kenmore Ave.

For more information about the fairs or tutoring and mentoring opportunities in specific Chicago neighborhoods, call TMC's Volunteer Recruitment Campaign Hotline, 467-5184. Donations of time or money are always appreciated.