By Jacquelyn Heard

Public-relations campaigns have turned up for groups that would seem unlikely to need help with their image charities.

While good intentions carry charities a fair distance, money and volunteers are the stuff of long-term survival. The source of those nutrients, says longtime volunteer Daniel Bassil, is the corporate world.

"From experience, I know that a group that operates for only a year or so doesn't do much good," said Bassil, a former advertising executive who has worked as a volunteer with city children for nearly two decades.

"Groups need to build their base of support and hire highly trained staff to reach the volunteers," he said.

And they need help on both of those counts. For that reason, Bassil recently established the Tutor/Mentor Connection, 335 W. Chicago Ave. Instead of providing the actual mentoring and tutoring services, the new group acts as a kind of adviser to and promoter for Chicago groups that do.

"They need someone to show them how to appeal to important people like CEOs and get them to say, 'I'm committed to this effort and I designate that employee or group of employees to work with this tutor/mentor group and stay with them for the long haul,'" Bassil said.

Through newsletters, direct mail and phone calls, the Tutor/Mentor Connection spreads the word about the benefits of helping troubled children in an effort to build up corporate support so that programs can become more stable community outlets.

The not-for-profit advocate group conducts studies and provides a forum where school, church and neighborhood groups can meet and brainstorm about how to drum up corporate donations and more effectively serve children at risk of gang involvement, drug abuse and other social ills.

It operates in conjunction with another organization Bassil founded, Cabrini Connection, which has for years provided a variety of social services to children on the Near North Side.

The new group in a recent study found that many of the neighborhoods that need mentors most have the fewest programs.

For example, the survey showed that in the gang-torn Roseland community, where 11-year-old murder suspect Robert Sandifer was found shot to death, there are about 12,000 school-age children and only one tutor/mentor program. By contrast, only about 5,000 school-age children live on the Near North Side, but it has about 15 tutor/mentor sites.

"We're developing maps showing just how needy some neighborhoods are," Bassil said.

"Our goal is to be proactive by providing information and support to give tutor/mentor programs more help in their efforts," he said.

At the Tutor/Mentor Connection's first conference at the Shedd Aquarium earlier this year, representatives from more than 100 volunteer groups participated in training and map sessions.

Based on ideas gleaned from that meeting, the group is working to develop a cable television spot to showcase successful volunteer programs and advertise the need for more groups like them.

"We had people who have volunteered for years and people who are new to the effort," said Nellie Himes, who helped coordinate the conference. "All of them agreed that as adults, we cannot sit back and allow another child to be thrown from a window or shot to death before we do something to help."

The Tutor/Mentor Connection can be reached at 312-697-5542.