HUMAN CAPITAL

A ‘trade group’ that distributes knowledge to kids

[DIRECTLINE] Daniel F. Bassill is president and chief executive of Cabrini Connections Inc., a not-for-profit organization that tutors inner-city children. The after-school program meets at the Montgomery Ward & Co. offices on Chicago Avenue. Mr. Bassill recently formed a network to link similar groups throughout the area.

For Daniel F. Bassill, a vague notion that he was helping a boy has turned into Cabrini Connections Inc., a tutoring organization.

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In 1994, we launched the tutor/mentor connection. We wanted to find other after-school tutoring programs and help those programs grow and expand. In our case, new markets are businesses that could provide volunteers, equipment or training. In Chicago, there are just 12,000 kids in after-school tutoring programs. That’s out of 500,000 school-age kids. The number of kids in these programs is nowhere near where it needs to be. Studies show we can move kids out of poverty, but it takes a consistent, long-term investment. It’s the non-school hours where there’s the least amount of adult supervision. There is a tremendous amount of good that can be done by getting kids together with adult mentors.

Fund raising is the most difficult thing we do. We beg, borrow and steal people’s hearts. We live from hand to mouth because we don’t have consistent funding. We can’t go to a venture capitalist. We don’t want business people to get involved. We want CEOs to help recruit volunteers from their employees.

The business community is not receptive enough. There are less than 15,000 adult volunteers in the city. There is no better way to bring people together than to have a tutor work with a kid. Everyone who comes here is changed.

As told to Jann Adler