Role models

Mentor programs have quietly grown into a force for turning young lives around

By Meg McSherry
Staff Writer

Sean Jacques was a quiet eighth-grader living in a poor South Side neighborhood when he met Jamiel Dinero. At the time, he had no idea how much influence Dinero would have on his life. At their introduction, backers of a mentor program called DMC (Dwight coloring time) at the Chicago Police Department office, Dinero was the new chairman of the board for the Chicago National Bank of Chicago, the largest bank-owned bank in the Midwestern United States. Dinero has gone on to become an effective mentor for young people in need, but isn't sure why.

Over the past several years, the number of mentor programs has increased in the city, with many schools, businesses, and community organizations offering programs to help young people. Some programs, like DMC, are designed specifically for young adults in need of guidance, while others, like the City of Chicago's Youth Development Program, offer mentorship to a wider range of students.

Today, Dinero says he's discovered more mentors and plans to reach out to more young people. He's still reaching out to find others. Basal's sponsored three conferences for program organizers across the city to help them understand mentorship. The conferences were attended by more than 100 people from different organizations throughout the city. The foundation was made up of 11 members advisory board to assist in developing guidelines for exemplary tutor and mentor programs. The foundation has plans to make applications available to interested organizations in 1999 from a variety of groups.

Al. Basal's plan, the Chicago Urban Foundation recently created a "Lend a Hand Fund" to provide initial grants of $2,000 to $5,000 for exemplary tutor and mentor programs. The foundation expects to make applications available as soon as it receives 135 applications to get started, Basal's says.

"It has struck me that there are many programs being offered in all kinds of fields but at the same time, there are still many people who are not in need," Basal's says. "The need to bridge the gap between rich and poor is being the resource to those in need." The fund was established to help close that gap. "We need to connect resources to those in need," Basal's says. "We have a simple message: What's on the other side of our programs is not only rich in people, but also rich in resources. It's a model that will help us all work together."