Back in 1972, when Dan Bassill of Chicago (above left) was volunteering at Montgomery Ward, he volunteered to tutor one fourth-grader living in a housing project. His life hasn’t been the same since. Soon he volunteered to head a tutoring program at work, managing hundreds of volunteers and students. Bassill says that companies concerned about diversity training can do nothing better than to get their employees tutoring kids from different backgrounds. “We need working people out in the community, seeing what kids’ lives are really like, working on solutions.” By 1990 the program was so big it needed a full-time director; Bassill left his good paying job to take it on.

When he broadened his vision to helping kids all over the city, his own board shot him down. A few volunteers who agreed with him signed on with Cabrini Connections, a new nonprofit that Bassill started with no money and a lot of hope. CC not only connects kids with mentors, it also runs motivation programs, organizes field trips to colleges and businesses, enlists corporations, hosts conferences at which tutors/mentor programs can share information, publishes newsletters and directories, stages mentor recruiting fairs, and runs a library of information on tutoring.

Today kids all across Chicago benefit from Cabrini Connections. Bassill’s new Vision?: Tutors/mentor programs in every neighborhood in every city in the country. Observers of Dan Bassill’s drive and dedication won’t be a bit surprised when he pulls it off.

THE GIRAFFE PROJECT

The Giraffe Project is a nonprofit organization that moves people to stick their necks out for the common good—and helps them to do it better.

The Project finds and summons “Giraffes,” people who are already sticking their necks out. Supporters of the Project are urged to spot such people and report sightings to the Project. Each quarter, a volunteer jury decides who will receive Giraffe commendations. They focus on the personal risks nonviolence have faced, and whether or not they were seeking for the common good. The risks can be social, financial, or physical, and can range from taking the loss of peer approval to risking physical harm. In defining the common good we can be specific: we believe that the common good is not furthered by actions that are violent, unconstitutional or solely self-serving.

We tell the stories of Giraffes to media and in our materials for students, as part of our mission to “emCourage” others. Our strategy is simple: we want people to take risks for the public good, so we show them someone else going first. We want to overcome apathy, cynicism and feelings of powerlessness; so we show what an ordinary person with courage and caring can do.

The Project has placed stories about these heroes in hundreds of local and national print and broadcast media and is now developing television and radio programming for families and for children.

The Project also gives workshops, research and seminars that help companies, colleges, labor unions, government agencies, service organizations and entire communities use Giraffe spirit and street-smarts in their work.

THE GIRAFFE PROJECT

For more information on materials, on education programs, on speeches and workshops, or on particular Giraffes, contact:

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