Volunteers get as much out of tutoring as kids

Back in 1973 when he was working in marketing for Montgomery Ward, Dan Basill enlisted as a volunteer in a company-sponsored tutoring/mentoring program for schoolkids from nearby Cabrini-Green.

More than 20 years later, Basill is involved full-time in directing such programs, including the Cabrini Kids' Connection and the Broader Tutor/Mentor Connection, which helps promote programs throughout the inner city and recruit and train volunteers for them.

It is something "that needs to be done," says Basill, noting there are 200,000 school-age children in Chicago's poor neighborhoods who often are stuck in the worst schools and do not have available either the resources or the "opportunities kids in other neighborhoods have."

There is also room, and need, for a lot more tutor/mentor volunteers to help these kids make it, says Basill. He points out that there are only about 10,000 volunteers working with fewer than 20,000 of these kids.

These programs are "not schools" and volunteers are "not teachers," Basill says.

What these kids need is a refuge from their environment and someone to encourage them, give them a push to stay in school, to do their homework, "show them how to learn, and to learn how important learning is," he says.

Being a volunteer can take an emotional toll when kids "don't respond or get pregnant or drop out" of school, Basill says.

But it also can bring volunteers immense satisfaction and even an enduring bond with the kids they work with, he says. "We tell the volunteers they will get as much from the experience, maybe even more, than the kids do."

Basill left Ward's employ in 1990 and converted the first Cabrini-Green program he had served in as a volunteer into a nonprofit organization for elementary school kids from Cabrini-Green.

In 1993 he started what is now Cabrini Kids' Connection for seventh- to 12th-graders at nearby St. Matthew's Church with seven volunteers and five kids.

Months later he moved into donated space on the 21st floor of Ward's corporate offices tower on West Chicago Avenue across from Cabrini-Green. The program, which among other things gives kids access to computers, is focused on a 3:30-7:30 p.m. session every Thursday and now has about 150 volunteers working with 311 kids.

Also in 1993, Basill laid the groundwork for his second program, T/MC (312-467-2869), also a nonprofit operation.

It aims at keeping track of and forging links between other tutoring/mentoring groups.

T/MC has just published the fourth edition of its directory, which supplies details on about 280 sites including color-coded maps showing location and neighborhood.

This is the part which you can't read:

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That answer pretty well says it all.