



Ecumenical Child Care Network Special Edition 2001

-A Newsletter for People of Faith in Action for All God's Children-

"Get wisdom! Get understanding,..." Proverbs 4: Verse 5

This is the message Cabrini Connections, a Chicago-based not-for-profit, puts into action as it mentors and tutors teens living in the Cabrini-Green public housing neighborhood of Chicago. However, it is through a second program of Cabrini Connections, the Tutor/Mentor Connection (T/MC), that this organizations' vision of tutoring and mentoring comes alive in Biblical proportions.

T/MC is creating a vast library of "knowledge and wisdom" about hundreds of tutor/mentor programs in Chicago in an effort to advocate the importance of tutoring everywhere. The T/MC library serves as a resource center for churches, corporations and other organizations that want to know where and what tutor/mentor programs exist in their neighborhoods.

"We're trying to learn everything there is to know about effective tutoring, mentoring and school to career programming," says Dan Bassill, the program's founder and president. "Who does it? Where do they do it? How, and how well? Who do they serve, and how many? Who supports these programs? We constantly draw on this information

to innovate ways to attract teens and workplace volunteers to participate in our Cabrini-Green program called Kid's Connections. And, through T/MC, we're sharing this information with other programs, and with businesses and foundations throughout Chicago, and America, so that others have more help in building and sustaining great programs."

T/MC recognizes it cannot know "everything". But by using the Internet, T/MC feels it can build links to information that others are collecting, making more information available for everyone. In addition, T/MC uses colorful charts to illustrate it's vision of an ideal program and support system, and uses computer-generated maps to show the entire city of Chicago with overlays showing where poverty and poorly performing schools are concentrated and where tutor/mentor programs operate. These maps include special overlays that show the location of churches by denomination. For example, the maps show the location of Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist,

Baptists, and Presbyterian churches in relation to impoverished neighborhoods and tutor/mentor programs.

"We'd like to see these maps light up with symbols indicating growing church involvement," Bassill says. "Some churches might host programs. Others might provide volunteers. Others might build awareness in regions beyond the poverty zone so congregations can learn ways to mobilize volunteers, donors, and business partners for programs throughout the city."

And all the information is free with one click to T/MC's website, www.turmentorconnection.org. The web site also includes key links to organizations throughout the world that opens a wide window of information about tutor/mentor issues such as fundraising, volunteer

(continued on page 3)



(continued from page 1)

recruitment, starting a program, training of staff or volunteers, or tutoring reading, math, science.

Bassill and his staff act much like revival tent preachers, constantly calling on youth, adults, business leaders, media, clergy, philanthropists and public leaders to "get informed, then get more involved." Using a variety of creative public awareness tactics, T/MC constantly calls on others to visit the web site regularly, reflect on its meaning, and apply this knowledge in building and sustaining more, and better, tutor/mentor programs in neighborhoods wherever youth, schools and families need help in educating and preparing children for adult responsibilities.

This is important news for ECCN and its member congregations. Rather than "reinvent" new ways of building non-school tutoring/mentoring programs, T/MC offers a source of information, inspiration, even training, recruitment and communications for any congregation to use. There is even a section at the T/MC web site offering clergy tips on how to lead this "partnership revival" by connecting scripture to service at strategic times of the year.

T/MC also organizes events such as the Chicagoland Volunteer Recruitment Campaign, and a November and May Tutor/Mentor Leadership and Training Conference.

"These can be easily duplicated in other parts of the country," Bassill suggests. "All it needs is one person or organization to take the lead the way Cabrini Connections has done since 1993."

In addition, T/MC has fashioned a standard model on how two, three or a dozen people can get together, learn from each other and create a tutor/mentor program that not only benefits them but perhaps thousands of children. ECCN and its member churches can borrow from this model to create new communities of leaders who draw upon spiritual strength to build stronger, smarter, and longer-lasting commitments in helping youth and families move from poverty to a place in the American dream.

"The problems of poverty, violence and poor schools did not arise in a day," Bassill says.

"Good solutions are not going to come about overnight. The learning library enables anyone to become more informed. T/MC conference, on-line discussion groups and other emerging communications technologies enable members of the faith community to connect

with each other and discuss these issues, even if the churches are in different neighborhoods or different cities." Visit the T/MC www.tutormentorconnection.org web site. Add it to your regular church bulletin or to a church newsletter. Spread the word through your business, university and social networks. Build a "Church Advocacy Team" to collect and distribute information, which your neighborhood and others can use to build and sustain more and better tutor/mentor programs throughout the country.

By building our own understanding, we can build more and better tutor/mentor programs. We can put this wisdom to work in more places and for more good. "Together, we can make a difference," Bassill says.

The Ecumenical Child Care Network

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From the Desk of the Executive Director

One defines mentoring as a one on one relationship with well a defined mission and established operating principles. A mentor is one that:

- (1) fosters a caring relationship;
- (2) helps children and youth develop their own potential for the future;
- (3) develop a structured one on one relationship that meets the needs of the mentored participant.

A responsible mentoring program begins by creating

- a purpose and long-range plan;
- a recruitment plan for mentors and participants; and
- an adequate orientation and screening plan.

It requires the facilitation of a monitor's progress and creation of recognition systems for its participants.

Mentoring programs can be a key to providing support to community children by providing sanctuaries of safe space and structured activities during after school hours. Because mentoring has resulted in the achievement of better grades in school it is the perfect place for churches to start as they develop an outreach ministry for community children. Mentoring activities are simple to devise. They may include activities like sponsoring

of Thursday night dinners; creating worship services designed for the mentor and the child; and establishing game nights with children and adults.

Because we know a good mentor can be a guide, a friend, a listener and a responsive adult, we know this type of programming in our communities of faith are essential for the development of children in our communities. Programs like the Tutoring/Mentoring Connection that can help churches and early childhood programs develop this type of ministry. Designing programs of this type will give each parishioner the opportunity to participate in their own unique way by sharing their gifts with children needing faith based guidance and support.

Child Care Information Exchange Partnership

The Ecumenical Child Care Network continues its partnership with the Child Care Information Exchange. As a member of ECCN, a strategic partner organization, you are entitled to receive two years (12) issues of Child Care Information Exchange for the one-year rate of only \$38, a savings of 50 percent! Plus, as an added bonus, you can save 20 percent on all you selections from the Exchange Bookstore catalogue of professional resources for directors and teachers. Watch for news about ECCN in future issues of Child Care Information Exchange. Good things come from great partnerships. Subscribe now and see.

