

Southwest News-Herald - Feb. 19, 1998 Pg. 1

Discuss Mentoring Program for Youths

By CANDY NOLAN

A total of one billion people will reach the ages of 13-23 by the year 2000.

So says Wrightwood community activist Willie Iverson, who also serves as the program director for the Ashburn Direct Action Coalition and works with the Wrightwood Youth Initiative.

Those figures were presented during a meeting Friday morning at First Chicago Bank, 79th and Cicero, conducted by Iverson. He introduced a new Total Quality Mentoring Program geared toward developing youth empowerment.

At this session, representatives from the Southwest Organizing Project, Chicago's Department of Human Services, the Imagine Chicago citizen leadership program, Wrightwood Improvement Association, Daley College, First Christian Church, First Chicago Bank and LaSalle Bank were on hand to hear Iverson's ideas.

"Young folks will dictate the answers tomorrow," according to Iverson.

"We need to win their hearts or they will break ours. A lot of people have not taken an interest in the children. How can they better bloom in the future?"

Monica Ward from First Chicago Bank pointed out that youths commit acts of fraud in the bank regularly. She felt that members of society can jump on the bandwagon and help youths make the right decisions so they can make a difference.

Within the Greater Ashburn community, which encompasses neighborhoods such as Ashburn, Wrightwood, Scottsdale and Parkview, there are two sites for after-school mentoring programs. They are located in Rainey and Hayes parks. Those neighborhoods contain 15,024 school-age youths ranging from kindergarten through high school.

There is also a population of 37,500 households in Greater Ashburn. Through Total Quality Mentoring, Iverson is seeking to have caring adults become active in the lives of young people. These adults can in-

clude parents, teachers, tutors, mentors and coaches.

He also wants to provide safe places with structured activities during non-school hours where they can learn and grow. As a source for program guidelines, he is turning to the Blueprints for Change of Chicago For Youth and Cobrini Connections Volunteer Handbook, Quantum Opportunity Program, and Action Plan for America: Chicago's Tutor/Mentor Connection.

Those publications describe how community organizations can broaden the sharing of resources and open underused facilities for youth programs. Along with Iverson, other members of his project team include Father Larry Dowling, pastor for St. Denis Church; Paula Boston, manager of First Chicago Bank, 8340 S. Kedzie; Brenda Golden, executive director of the 8th District's Youth Network; Bobby Watkins, program director; and Yusulf Hassan, program coordinator for the Ashburn Direct Action Coalition.

Iverson estimates his initial budget for the program will be approximately \$5,300.

"We need to reach out and grab them," commented Iverson. "We need to be that force to bring about change and make a difference for the young person. By relooking at young people today, we can restart them. It's a simple thing to do. I feel I am God's mission and on the right track."

Total Quality Mentoring will include providing youths with marketable skills that can be used to start them off in a career. Sessions will cover technology and computer programs, school-to-work programs, science, math, writing, desktop publishing, dance, theatre, music and health programs to teach against using drugs or becoming teenage parents.

"This is not an easy task," Iverson admitted. "We need to be willing to take direct action and step up to the plate. I am an activist with a passion about young folks. I am a true guer-