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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Community Foundation Awards \$125,000 in Workforce Development,
Early Literacy Grants**
Polaroid Fund and Acushnet Foundation Fund Team Up to Offer Grants

The Community Foundation of Southeastern Massachusetts (CFSEMA) has awarded \$125,000 in grants from the Polaroid Fund and the Acushnet Foundation Fund to New Bedford area programs that focus on Workforce Development and Early Literacy.

Four organizations received a total of \$75,000 for Workforce Development programs through the Polaroid Fund's New Bedford area grants program, which is being managed by CFSEMA for a second year under a contract with the Boston Foundation. Another \$25,000 was awarded by the Polaroid Fund as a matching grant to the Acushnet Foundation Fund, for a total of \$50,000 awarded to two organizations for Early Literacy programs.

"The relationship between family literacy, early literacy development, school readiness, school success, high school graduation rates and workforce development provides an opportunity to engage parents with young children," said CFSEMA President Craig J. Dutra. "The matching funds from the Polaroid and Acushnet Foundation funds will be used for projects that integrate ESOL and ABE classes with early literacy programs."

Grants were awarded to the following four organizations for Workforce Developments projects which emphasize English Literacy (ESOL) and Adult Education (ABE and GED courses).

- **Bristol Community College**, \$25,000 grant for "ESOL Pathways and College Careers". This program is intended to increase the skills of graduates of GED and Adult Diploma programs to ensure success in post-secondary education. The grant will also fund counseling and training for citizenship.
- **Catholic Social Services**, \$24,000 for "Future Education and Adult Literacy," which will provide instruction in literacy, English and intensive GED training

for native Spanish and Portuguese speakers. The program will address the needs of the older student population in New Bedford's North and South Ends.

- **Community Economic Development Center of SE Mass. (CEDC)**, \$15,000 for “ESOL Computer literacy” Spanish-based instruction in basic workplace English and basic computer literacy for ESOL students.
- **Steppingstone**, \$11,000 for “New Bedford Women’s Program, Project EdNA,” to provide programming for the expansion of adult education, formal job training and post-secondary educational opportunities, including assessment and guidance. Steppingstone will overcome access barriers by providing child care and transportation.

Early Literacy grants were awarded to **PACE, \$43,000 for a “New Bedford Family Literacy Project”** intended to integrate an adult literacy/ESOL program with parenting and early literacy skills, while **Catholic Social Services received a \$7,000 grant for an Early Literacy Program** that will work with an at-risk population in transitional housing

The Greater New Bedford region faces numerous workforce challenges, including high unemployment and low educational attainment. To achieve true workforce development and readiness in this region, non-English speakers need to become proficient enough in English to perform well in the workplace and to achieve their educational goals. Adults without high school diplomas need ready access to GED classes, and GED recipients need help transitioning to post-secondary education. Also, immigrants need access to citizenship classes and information about worker’s rights.

New Bedford also has a lower-than-average high school graduation rate of 59% (the statewide average is 86%). To improve this, children from birth to age 3 need to have improved early literacy experiences, which can be accomplished by providing support for their parents and caregivers.

A total of nine applications with requests for grants totaling \$190,071 were submitted for the workforce development grants. Four Early Literacy proposals were also submitted, with total requests of \$106,760. Members of CFSEMA’s Distribution Committee review the applications, visit and interview the applicants, and present their findings to the entire committee. The Committee then develops grant recommendations that are presented to the CFSEMA board of directors for approval.