

10/03/2007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Polaroid Fund, Acushnet Foundation Fund,
Team Up to Fund Family Literacy Programs**
RFPs available for up to \$125,000 for Literacy/Adult Education Programs

Two funds of the **Community Foundation of Southeastern Massachusetts** (CFSEMA) are teaming up to develop the Greater New Bedford work force by funding family literacy and adult education programs.

Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for up to \$100,000 from the Polaroid Fund and up to \$25,000 in matching funds from the Acushnet Foundation Fund are available from the Community Foundation or its website, www.cfsema.org They are due at the Community Foundation office, 227 Union Street, Suite 609, New Bedford, no later than **4 p.m. October 23**. An **Applicants Conference** for agencies interested in applying for a grant is scheduled for **10-11:30 a.m. on Thursday, Oct. 4**, in the CFSEMA conference room.

“The purpose of the project is to support adults in their quest to become more independent and realize their full potential as successful members of society,” said CFSEMA President Craig J. Dutra. “To help accomplish this, the grants will support programs that help the most vulnerable people in the community build the skills and literacy that will help them reach their educational and employment goals.”

Last year, the Community Foundation began managing the New Bedford Area grant program of the Polaroid Fund, a discretionary fund of the Boston Foundation. The Polaroid Fund will distribute up to \$100,000 each year to support organizations or collaboratives that focus on workforce development, with an emphasis on English literacy (ESOL) and adult education (ABE and GED courses.)

This year, a total of \$75,000 from the Polaroid Fund will support workforce development programming, with an emphasis on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Adult Basic Education (ABE), and General Education Development (GED) classes, and \$50,000 – half from each the Polaroid and Acushnet Foundation funds – will support family literacy programs that integrate early literacy programming for children birth to three years old with ESOL and parenting courses.

Organizations can request up to \$25,000 for projects that mitigate barriers to learning such as cultural and language differences, transportation or child care issues; preserve and support neighborhood based programs providing access to literacy and ABE/ESOL classes; address gaps in programming and provider services; advocate for public policy to redress provider shortages, for incentives to offer workplace literacy programs, and for increases in state and local funding; and to support capacity building programs that meet one or more of the objectives listed above.

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.

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. New Bedford's high school graduation rate is 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. The matching funds from the Acushnet Foundation will be used for projects that integrate ESOL and ABE classes with early literacy programs.

About the Community Foundation

Since 1995, area residents have been turning to the Community Foundation of Southeastern Massachusetts to make their philanthropic giving as effective as possible. CFSEMA is a public charity serving thousands of people who share a common concern – improving the quality of life in Southeastern Massachusetts. To date, the Community Foundation has assets of more than \$15 million and has distributed over \$5 million from 114 funds to humanitarian, educational and cultural organizations in the region. More information about the Foundation can be found at www.cfsema.org.