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For Immediate Release

Early Literacy Consortium Promotes Family Literacy *Events planned in November for Family Literacy Month*

November is Family Literacy Month, and local families can encourage their children to read by listening to storytellers at the public library, visiting the mayor's office to pick out a free book, or attending a host of other events at local schools and other sites around the city.

The Family Literacy events are made possible through the efforts of the Greater New Bedford Early Literacy Consortium, a project of the Community Foundation of Southeastern Massachusetts (CFSEMA) through its Acushnet Foundation Fund.

"We have partnered with other community organizations to promote early literacy skills so children enter school prepared to become successful readers," said CFSEMA President Craig J. Dutra. "Learning to read early and well is critical to success in school, which in turn is key to improving our region's low educational attainment."

Research has spotlighted reading to young children as the single strongest predictor of school success. Low reading achievement is the main reason for "low-performing" schools. On last spring's third-grade MCAS reading exam, the New Bedford public schools ranked 282 out of 299 school systems and charter schools. This lack of adequate reading skills is connected to the city schools' low graduation rate, Consortium members say.

The Early Literacy Consortium was formed in the spring of 2007 to work with area providers to bring attention to the essential learning that can take place during the first three years of life. The Consortium includes early literacy and care providers including pediatricians, the Greater New Bedford Workforce Investment Board, the New Bedford Public Library, the New Bedford Public Schools, PACE Head Start, and United Way of Greater New Bedford, among others.

Consortium projects include expansion of local participation in the *Reach Out and Read* program, which trains doctors and nurses to inform parents about the benefits of reading aloud and to give children age-appropriate books; seven local *Reach Out and Read* programs now serve more than 6,900 children and their families, more than double the number of children who participated two years ago. As a part of *Reach Out and Read*, Foster Grandparent volunteers are reading to young children in the Greater New Bedford Community Health Center waiting room. These efforts were made possible by the Acushnet Foundation Fund and other supporters.

Other ELC projects include: the distribution of "Welcome Bags," which include a book and a library card application, to all parents of newborns at St. Luke's Hospital, and in the near future, Tobey Hospital; "story times" at public libraries; college courses to train infant/toddler teachers on early literacy strategies; and advocacy for increased government and private sector support to make daily reading a part of every baby's life.

Among the events scheduled during Family Literacy Month is a professional storyteller at the New Bedford Public Library at 6 p.m. on AHA! night Nov. 12. AHA! is a flagship fund of the Community Foundation. For more information on Family Literacy Month events call (508) 996-8253, ext. 210

Also, the Acushnet Foundation Fund and the Polaroid Fund of the Boston Foundation, which is managed by CFSEMA, have teamed up for the past two years to make family literacy grants to programs that integrate early literacy programming for children birth to three years. Grants have been awarded to the PACE Family Center at Hayden McFadden Elementary School and Catholic Social Services' Donovan House, a transitional living program for women and children;

The Early Literacy Consortium has also received a \$116,000 "Pathways to Success" grant from the Mass. Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education to support family literacy programs offered at the New Bedford Adult Education Department, the Hayden McFadden Family Center, and others.

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 distributed over \$8 million from 120 funds to humanitarian, educational and cultural organizations in the region. More information about the Foundation can be found at www.cfsema.org.

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