



FAMILY INDEPENDENCE INITIATIVE (FII)

Summary

FII is a three-year pilot project designed to help Alameda County's low-income families, including CalWORKs families, achieve self-sufficiency. By working with families in their communities, FII uses affinity-based social networks and financial incentives for families to work together toward economic stability.

The Alameda County Social Services Agency (SSA), in partnership with FII representatives, is responsible for FII. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) provides technical assistance, receives quarterly progress reports, and participates in on-going meetings.

Alameda County is authorized to conduct this pilot from April 1, 2003, through March 31, 2006. The three-year budget for FII is \$3 million dollars. These funds have been secured by contributions from various private foundations.

Alameda County requested a waiver for the FII pilot project from CDSS, which was necessary for CalWORKs families to participate in this project. CDSS granted the waiver under the Welfare & Institutions Code 18230 Sections 11010, 11155, and 11160. The waiver will exempt FII CalWORKs clients from having their benefits reduced. The USDA Food Stamp Programs also granted an exemption to their regulation to align their income and resources regulation with the sections waived for the FII CalWORKs clients.

Approximately 200 families will participate within the three-year pilot project. Of the 200 families, at least 75 will be CalWORKs families. Another 75 families will consist of either former CalWORKs clients or clients eligible for CalWORKs benefits. Through FII, these families will develop the social support systems and peer networks that reinforce each others' goals of self-sufficiency, and will help them become future leaders and role models in their community.

Families may receive financial incentives of a maximum of \$3000 per year, based on their achievements of reaching the identified goals. These cash incentives are given for family and community accomplishments and progress in employment, education, increased savings, health, and for taking leadership roles.

Individual Development Account (IDA) holders receive matching funds, up to \$2,000 per year over two years. These funds may be saved for education expenses, business development, and buying or building a home. Training, including financial management planning, will be provided to help families build assets and optimize their options.

FII families can also receive a home computer with internet connections and basic computer training. These families are required to report their progress, via computer, to county staff who will track and analyze the progress families make towards self-sufficiency.

The prominent Commissioners involved in the FII program include: **Michael Bernick**, Director, California State Employment Development Department; **Robert Bobb**, City Manager, City of Oakland; **The Honorable Jerry Brown**, Mayor, City of Oakland; **Assemblywoman Wilma Chan**, Majority Leader, California State Assembly; **Henry Chang**, Council Member, City of Oakland; **Dr. Sandra Hernandez**, CEO, The San Francisco Foundation; **Chet Hewitt**, Director of Alameda County Social Services Agency; **Sherry M. Hirota**, Trustee, The California Endowment; **Michael M. Howe**, President, The East Bay Community Foundation; **David Kears**, Director, Alameda County Health Care Services; **Supervisor Alice Lai-Bitker**, Alameda County Board of Supervisors; **Congresswoman Barbara Lee**, U.S. Representative California, 9th District; **Dr. Richard McCline**, President, Oakland Black Chamber of Commerce; **Karen B. Shawcross**, VP, Back of America; **Ralph Smith**, Senior VP, The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

For more information about the Alameda County FII program, please contact Brendan Leung, Department of Workforce and Human Services, 24100 Amador Street, 6th Floor, Hayward, California 94544-1203, at (510) 259-3813 or Bleung@co.alameda.ca.us. FII's web address is www.fiinet.org.

For more information regarding CalWORKs FII participation, please contact Antonia Taylor, California Department of Social Services, at (916) 653-1172, or Antonia.Taylor@dss.ca.gov. 7/10/03