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Employment program for minority  
group female single parents  
The Rockefeller Foundation

1133 AVENUE OF THE AMERICAS, NEW YORK, N. Y. 10036

CABLE: ROCKFOUND, NEW YORK  
TELEPHONE: (212) 869 - 8500

Morning Papers

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Families Headed by Minority Women to Receive Special Assistance

The Rockefeller Foundation today announced a new initiative to reach what its trustees describe as the "most disadvantaged members of our society: single, minority women who are heads of households." As a first step, the trustees voted a special appropriation of \$1 million, in addition to \$750,000 from regular budgets. This sum will be used in the coming year for grants to selected community organizations to help them train such women to seek and qualify for constructive work in the private sector. Careful evaluations will be made to obtain successful approaches to reduction of poverty and welfare dependency.

Richard W. Lyman, President of The Rockefeller Foundation, said the action was taken because of the Foundation's "increasing concern over the damage that can be expected to society if we continue to fail to reach those whose lives bar them from qualifying for existing opportunities. We also want to underscore the Foundation's commitment to poor blacks and Hispanics at a time when their plight ranks relatively low on the national agenda."

The action was taken by the Foundation after lengthy consultations by an Ad Hoc Committee of Trustees with minority leaders in public and private life. Dr. Lyman, who chaired the committee, said that many



well-reasoned proposals had been received, ranging from support for the improvement of public schooling to increased funding of private civil rights organizations. He stressed that the decision to fund training of single, minority women who head families is "obviously only a single aspect, albeit a very central and significant one, of the problems of those left behind."

He said that the trustees were willing to consider further annual appropriations at a level of \$1 million or more for several years for this purpose.

The new thrust will be undertaken as an addition to, but in the context of, the Foundation's well-established program toward Equal Opportunity, which since 1963 has made grants in excess of \$91 million in the fields of minority educational and employment opportunities and for the programs of civil rights organizations.

#### The Target Group

Dr. Lyman pointed out that "some of the most intractable problems of poverty in our country are associated with minority group families headed by women." At the end of the 1970s, 15 percent of all American families were headed by women, but 41 percent of black families had women as their heads. Between 1970 and 1980, the number of black families headed by women rose by 73 percent; similarly, Hispanic families (mainly Puerto Rican) rose by 76 percent. And the numbers are still rising: it seems likely that by 1990 more than half of the nation's black families will be headed by women.

#### Economic Distress

The most troubling characteristic of such families is their deep



economic distress: fewer than one-fifth of female-headed families have an income as high as \$15,000 a year. This compares with 61 percent of husband-wife families, and 48 percent of male-headed families.

Almost one-half of female-headed black families live in poverty. The figure for similar white families is 23 percent. Viewed from another perspective, today 60 percent of black people below the poverty line live in such families; three-quarters of all black children live in families headed by women.

#### Toward Employment

"For many if not most of these families, unemployment is the major problem," says Dr. Lyman. "The unemployment rate among these black women is more than double that of similar white women. The best way to improve the economic status of such families is to open up a wide range of job opportunities for them."

Dr. Lyman announced that a carefully selected number of community-based organizations with proven records in providing employment and training services for the disadvantaged would be asked to submit proposals. Every proposal is required to have provisions for matching funds from public or private sources. Grants will be monitored closely for results of wider significance.

A committee of distinguished men and women familiar with the problems of the urban minority poor will be organized to review the proposals and to make recommendations for Foundation funding. The committee will be chaired by Dr. Phyllis A. Wallace, Professor of Management, Sloan School, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Dr. Lyman said that working with the officers of the Foundation,



Dr. Wallace and the members of the committee would ensure that the three objectives of the new undertaking would be met. They are:

—To identify minority, single women who head families and to provide them with employability assistance that will help them to obtain good jobs in the private sector.

—To assist a small number of minority-group, community-based organizations to preserve and strengthen their capacity to provide such services.

—To document and evaluate the experiences of these organizations in order to obtain successful approaches to the reduction of poverty and welfare dependency.

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Contact: Henry Romney

Office: (212) 869-8500

Home: (212) 288-4357