**Indiana's REACH Program Evaluation Summary**

**Abstract**
The Housing and Community Services Section of the Division of Family and Children (Indiana Family and Social Services Administration) developed a program to assist selected Energy Assistance Program households achieve financial independence. Support for participants was offered through four Community Action Agencies (CAAs) that cover north, west, middle and south components of large geographic areas in the state. The CAAs initiated a process to identify eligible households and then provided an array of integrated services to help them become financially stable.

**Duration**
Three years (FY 1998, 1999, 2000)

**Grant Amount**
$1,510,840, 1997 funds

**Goals**
The intent of the program was to facilitate the process of achieving financial independence and stability in families.

**Client Eligibility**
Energy Assistance Program participants with a history of high energy costs, overdue rent and utilities, or frequent changes of address. (Only clients with metered utility service were included in the evaluation survey.)

**Client Services**
The project assumption was that low-income households spend a disproportionate amount of their income on their energy bills. The Indiana REACH coordinated a number of services, including support services, health services, budget and housing counseling, energy education, identification of barriers to self-sufficiency, and referrals and follow-up to the appropriate agencies for counseling.

**Outcomes**
As the Indiana REACH program was originally envisioned, participants had to be just coming off of welfare or about to lose welfare, and to have exhausted all other sources of assistance. Both of these requirements were dropped after the first year of the program.

The program budgeted up to $2,400 per household. The program components included 1) supportive services such as clothing, transportation, vehicle repair, and childcare; 2) help with medical services needed for employment; 3) skill development, particularly energy education and budget counseling; 4) energy benefits, including EAP, assistance for reconnect fees, deposits and arrearages; 5) housing benefits to erase mortgage and rent arrears; 6) weatherization services through the federal Weatherization Assistance Program; and 7) energy efficiency education for those with high energy use. Because delivery of services and education was extremely time-intensive, the agencies were allowed to charge administrative costs of up to 50 percent.

The initial program goal was to enroll a total of 360 households, or 30 annually for three years for each CAA. Because of program delays, that goal was revised to 240, or 30 annually for two years. The final total for the program was 211 participants.

According to an independent evaluation, the Indiana REACH program achieved the following goals for participating households:

* An overall increase in total household income of about 22 percent
* An average reduction in electric debt of 15 percent and in natural gas debt of 26 percent
* Overall average family debt increased by 33 percent; however, 52 percent of the increase was part of moves toward self-sufficiency, such as buying a car or appliances or going back to school.
* The proportion of families that moved decreased by 52 percent; children in participating families decreased number of days missed at school by an average of 18 percent.

**Comments**
The evaluation criticized the inconsistency of techniques for collecting household data that were used to score family stability. Although it noted that data collection improved as the program progressed, there was no way to improve the poor data from its initial phase.