



# Moving People Out Of Poverty Permanently



Anti-poverty programs have historically excluded community-led solutions. In the current system, low-income families are seen as a hopeless drain on resources rather than an opportunity in which to invest. This deficit-based system isn't working, and it is keeping Chicagoans from achieving economic mobility. This is particularly true for Black and brown families, who experience racial disparities across economic, educational, and health outcomes. Family Independence Initiative (FII) offers an alternative: **invest directly in the strengths of communities and allow them the autonomy to be the experts in their own lives.**

Through our strength-based approach, we invest in families through direct cash investments, cede control of these dollars to the families themselves, and offer an online platform for people to build and strengthen social networks. Our families report increased income, assets, and community support. **This project, with support from Lever for Change, will demonstrate what is possible when you combine this strength-based approach with rigorous evaluation, narrative change, and government partnership.** We aim to invest in 1,000 Chicagoans and study their progress towards their own goals, while also measuring the effectiveness of our strength-based approach against other available services. Ultimately, we will prove that investing in

communities has the highest social return on investment in terms of actually moving the needle for economic and social mobility.

This project will act as a model to be replicated across the nation. Our vision is the elimination of poverty in the United States. We will accomplish this through broad adoption of our strength-based approach by all levels of government and philanthropy so that people in the United States, regardless of economic backgrounds, are seen and invested in for their strengths and are able to build their social and financial assets.

The veil that was obscuring the health and economic disparities related to race in the United States has been pulled back by the life and death reality of COVID-19, as has the recent institutionalized racial violence and response by the Black Lives Matter movement. Now, more than ever, a nation-wide movement is needed to address these harsh, deadly systemic inequities. FII's strength-based, data-driven model, which has a 19-year track record of success with low-income families of color, can be a critical piece of a nation-wide comprehensive strategy. We will work directly with government entities to examine policies and practices and promote investing in communities based on strength to ultimately shift the \$400B spent a year on poverty alleviation away from ineffective services and towards the communities themselves.

# FII challenges the standard model of poverty alleviation by investing directly in the strengths of communities

We know that people don't live in poverty because they are lazy or mismanage money. Rather, poverty, which disproportionately impacts Black and Latinx communities, can be traced to well-intentioned but inadequate governmental and charitable policies and practices that rely on a top-down approach. At FII, we view low-income individuals from a position of strength, recognizing that they have the capacity and insight needed to make decisions for themselves and don't need outside saviors. Our strength-based model includes three core components:



## CAPITAL

Direct cash investments into the community



## CHOICE

Freedom for families to use the cash as they see fit. They are the experts in their own lives.



## COMMUNITY

An online platform for people to build and strengthen social networks

FII was founded in 2001 in Oakland, California by social innovator Mauricio Lim Miller after former Governor Jerry Brown challenged him to successfully break the cycle of poverty. Since then, across the country, we have consistently shown that the combination of direct cash payments, progress tracking, and peer networks results in the increased self-determination and economic mobility of low-income people.

### LOGIC MODEL FOR THE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY CHALLENGE

