

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How did 1 in 11 children come into contact with Hamilton County Job and Family Services (HCJFS) child welfare agency in 2016?

This statistic represents the total number of children that had *any* contact with HCJFS's child welfare division in 2016. This involvement could have been through a new referral to 241-KIDS in 2016, but it also represents existing cases where HCJFS provided ongoing services after safety threats to a child's health or welfare were substantiated. The vast majority of families served by the HCJFS child welfare division (75-80%) do not have children removed from their homes. However, more than 2,200 children each year are removed and placed in the county custody to ensure their safety and welfare.

2. How do I properly interpret the learning provided in this report?

When children are removed from their homes, enter the child welfare system and then emancipate to adulthood without ever reaching a permanent situation, there are significant costs to Hamilton County. While Hamilton County is aware of how much is spent each year by Hamilton County Job and Family Services, our county's leaders and stakeholders are not currently aware of the incremental costs spread throughout our community. This analysis was done to shed light on the magnitude of these costs as a result of children emancipating from child protective custody. The report presents a conservative "estimate" of these costs.

The analysis indicates that HEMI is a promising initiative through which positive directional improvements have been realized by the youth who have engaged with the program. At this stage in this program's development (after HEMI's first six years), the Preliminary Return on Investment (ROI) is estimated to be 248%. The ROI will change in the future as HEMI evolves and serves more youth.

3. How was the economic impact calculated?

To understand the economic impact of any social issue, it is important to first have a baseline understanding of what would happen if this social issue had not occurred. The "estimated" economic impact is the *difference* between this baseline and the incremental costs associated with the social situation being evaluated—in this case youth emancipating from child protective custody (commonly called foster care). For this study, the baseline data used comes from the National Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health – <http://www.cpc.unc.edu/addhealth>). See the report for further details.

4. What methodology was used in this study?

A mixed method approach was utilized. The literature review addressed many of the qualitative contexts of the lives and experiences of foster youth. These contextual details are intended to reveal the challenges that foster

youth face. Hamilton County Job and Family Services (HCJFS) data assisted in describing the demographic breakdown of the foster youth population, in- and out-of care.

The quantitative estimates were calculated over an 8-year period: 2008-2015. The chart below shows the estimated number of emancipated youth that exited HCJFS programming during the study period.

Estimated Number of Youth that Emancipate per Year in Hamilton County

	Year of the Study							
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	+108	108	108	108	108	108	108	108
		+108	108	108	108	108	108	108
			+108	108	108	108	108	108
				+108	108	108	108	108
					+108	108	108	108
						+108	108	108
							+108	108
								+108
Cumulative Emancipated Youth	108	216	324	432	540	648	756	864

Using longitudinal data from emancipated foster youth living in various cities in the Midwest, outcome statistics were calculated as a proxy for Hamilton County emancipated foster youth. The estimates of the costs related to outcomes were then localized, where data was available. Estimated costs calculated for Hamilton County emancipated youth included involvement in the criminal justice system, homelessness, healthcare costs, and lost productivity.

The proxy estimates for Hamilton County emancipated foster youth were then compared to HEMI employment data and pregnancy rates to estimate the impacts that HEMI program has produced.

The Economics Center applied the analysis method that was best suited to the data available for each section. See the report for further details.

5. What are the limitations of this study?

The primary limitation of this study is the scarcity of actual information about the specific challenges faced by Hamilton County youth who leave foster care (in part because it is both difficult and expensive to obtain this information). This limitation is noted throughout the report. Pay special attention to the footnotes and the written analysis provided, to fully

understand the impact of the limitation(s). Also note that when the word “estimated” is used, this means the data are not actual Hamilton County data but are instead reasonable approximations.

That said, it is worth mentioning that economic impact studies like this are often conservative “estimates” of the true economic impact. This is because data are often not available for every issue that someone might experience as a result of her or his individual social situation (also see question 2, 6, and 7). Moreover, the costs for this analysis were only calculated over an 8-year timespan until the oldest cohort of participants was 26 years old or under. The productivity gap between foster youth and the general population continues to widen beyond age 26 as noted in the report.

For the HEMI section, it is important to note that the program evaluation provided is neither *predictive* nor *causal*; it is *descriptive*. This means that the information contained in this section merely describes what has happened since HEMI’s inception. A different type of analysis would need to be conducted to determine whether or not these outcomes are caused by HEMI or could be predicted in the future (also see question 2). Unfortunately, conducting a causal or predictive research study on HEMI would be quite expensive and take many years.

When reviewing the HEMI information, note that point-in-time data do not always capture the actual academic trajectories of foster youth. Foster youth who are credit deficient may take more than four or five years to graduate high school. HEMI continues to work with these youth, whenever possible, until they earn a high school degree (preferably), or GED.

6. Why does this report have some Hamilton County data and some national/regional data, but the economic impact section says “estimated”?

The beginning section of this report provides contextual background. Actual Hamilton County data are provided about how and why children are removed from their homes, how long they reside in county custody, and how they might “emancipate” from custody as they reach the age of majority, as well as some Medicaid data. Additional information is also provided from national and regional studies to describe what youth encounter as they exit county custody.

As is often the case, all the data needed to calculate the economic impact were not available. This is, in part, because there are so many organizations, systems and entities that work with youth who are in or have aged out of county custody. There are several government agencies involved, but there are also numerous social service agencies, health care organizations and other private systems and entities throughout the county that provide support at different times. Gathering all this data is not possible, as these data systems are not all linked at this time. As a result of limitations of this

type, economic analysts use the most relevant and appropriate surrogate data available to estimate the economic impact.

7. What data have been used to “estimate” the costs to Hamilton County?

To estimate the cost of emancipated youth to Hamilton County, a proxy study was used to represent Hamilton County because no such similar data existed locally. An analysis on the appropriateness of this proxy study, Midwest Evaluation of Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth, has been included in the report Appendix. Additional information was also needed to estimate costs in each cost category. See the report for further details.

8. How is this economic impact study similar to or different from other studies that have been done?

Economic impact studies on social issues tend to be done at the individual level, where the impacts are estimated per person for her/his entire lifetime. However, this analysis is different and is instead a backward estimate of what occurred during 2008-2015. The primary reason this method was chosen is that the proxy data worked well using this method.

9. What recommendations does the UC Economics Center have as a result of doing this analysis?

As mentioned in the report, the availability of comparable datasets presented a significant challenge to producing more precise local cost estimates.

Once foster youth emancipate from programming, the social services available for support are not managed within a single service network. Public, nonprofit, and faith-based organizations frequently serve similar needs, but offer their services independently. Therefore, data collection is not standardized between organizations. An umbrella organization focused on data management could potentially centralize and standardize the data collection process and more easily manage outcome evaluation.

10. What can be done to better understand the full financial impact of social issues locally in the future?

Conducting a local longitudinal study of individuals that have gone through HCJFS services would clarify the local costs of emancipated youth for Hamilton County. A long-term study could capture both the local costs of every social service required by emancipated youth, as well as the variability of outcomes experienced between HEMI participants and other foster youth.

Additionally, a longitudinal study would be capable of exploring the outcome differences between individuals that are adopted before age 18 and those that age-out of HCJFS programming.