



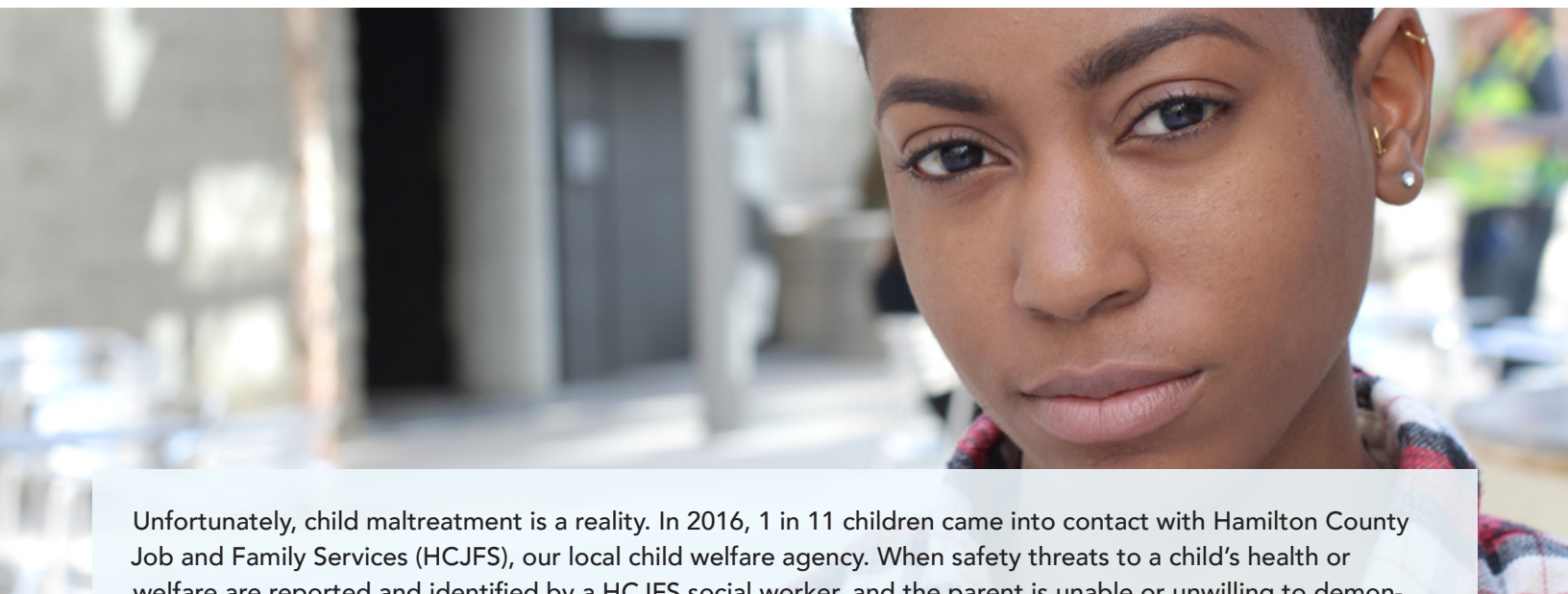
THE ECONOMICS OF EMANCIPATED FOSTER YOUTH

HAMILTON COUNTY, OHIO
2017



Foster children aging out of Hamilton County's child welfare system cost local residents **\$17.7 Million** in social expenses and lost productivity each year.

According to a local financial impact study by the University of Cincinnati's Economics Center and Hamilton County Job and Family Services.



Unfortunately, child maltreatment is a reality. In 2016, 1 in 11 children came into contact with Hamilton County Job and Family Services (HCJFS), our local child welfare agency. When safety threats to a child's health or welfare are reported and identified by a HCJFS social worker, and the parent is unable or unwilling to demonstrate protective capacities to keep the child safe, the child is removed from the home and placed by the court in protective custody. There are complex, and often multiple, reasons children are removed from the care of a parent. While removals are often due to abuse or neglect, factors such as substance abuse, death, mental illness, chronic homelessness, incarceration or deportation are also reasons children need a new home.

Each year, more than 2,200 local children are removed from their homes and placed in the care of HCJFS. HCJFS works with local agencies to identify a suitable living arrangement for each child — a licensed foster home or placement with a relative, or a licensed residential group home or treatment facility. Children in protective custody arrangements such as these are commonly referred to as "foster youth."

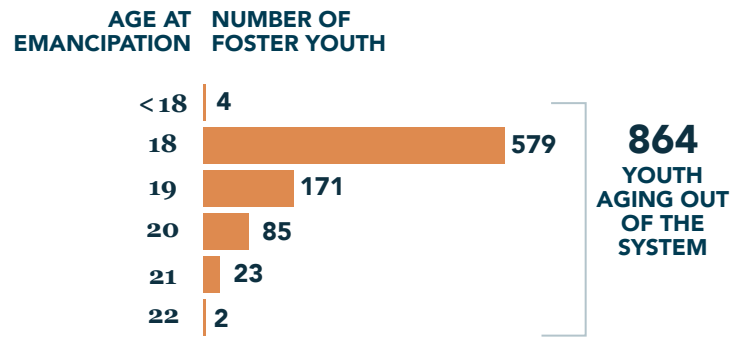
The good news is that, provided with appropriate interventions, most children are able to return home or eventually find a new forever home. But, some foster youth remain in the system until they "emancipate" or "age out," typically at 18 years of age.

This study is the first comprehensive look at the financial impact on Hamilton County of emancipating foster youth.

1 IN 11 CHILDREN
CAME INTO CONTACT
WITH HAMILTON COUNTY
JOB AND FAMILY SERVICES
IN 2016.

Hamilton County Job and Family Services reports

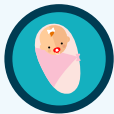
The analysis examined 864 former foster youth who emancipated from Hamilton County Job and Family Services from 2008 to 2015 and assessed their financial impact locally based on the results of national and regional studies. Those costs are related to the young adults' involvement in the criminal justice, homeless and health care systems, as well as lost productivity because they are not employed at the same level as their peers in the general population.



STUDY AFTER STUDY HAS SHOWN EMANCIPATED FOSTER CHILDREN ARE MORE LIKELY TO EXPERIENCE:



Lower Levels
of Education



Unplanned
Pregnancy



Homelessness



Underemployment



Insurance
Coverage
Gaps



Criminal
Justice System
Involvement



Social
Service System
Involvement

1 IN 3 STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE REPEAT A GRADE.

Ohio Department of Education:
Every Student Succeeds Act Foster Care Provisions (2016)

WHILE MORE THAN 80% OF FOSTER CHILDREN EXPRESS A DESIRE TO EARN A COLLEGE DEGREE, LESS THAN 10% ACTUALLY DO.

Research Highlights on Education and Foster Care (2014)

ANNUAL COST

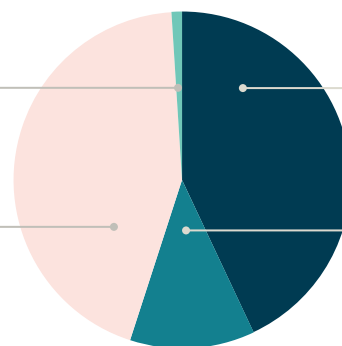
On average, **108 young people emancipated annually** from Hamilton County JFS during the study period.

The average annual cost for emancipated youth through age 26 is estimated to be:

\$17.7 million

\$73,000
HOMELESSNESS
Shelter Expenses

\$7.9 million
LOST PRODUCTIVITY
Unemployed or Underemployed



\$7.6 million
HEALTH
Mental &
Physical Health

\$2.1 million
CRIMINAL JUSTICE
Arrests, Convictions,
Incarcerations

The study did not factor costs related to the child welfare system. Nor did it take into consideration all the long-term effects on self-esteem and emotional well-being after experiencing childhood trauma.

MOIRA WEIR, director of JFS, said the UC study confirms the agency's anecdotal experience with youth who age out of the system while in the custody of the agency instead of a dedicated, caring adult. She noted the study focused on young adults age 26 or under and that many problems compound as they age, so the actual costs are even greater and the gap in productivity is wider throughout their lifetime.

"We have taken many steps over the years to better prepare our foster youth for the challenges they are going to face, but we know that, no matter the preparation, any young person who suddenly finds themselves alone at age 18 or 21 is going to struggle," she said. "This study puts a quantifiable number on the cost to local taxpayers and makes a strong argument for investing in prevention programs that will mitigate those costs."

"We need to invest in prevention programs that will mitigate those costs."

THE GOOD NEWS

Community interventions can have a positive impact on those costs, including a promising local mentoring program for foster youth.

THE HIGHER EDUCATION MENTORING INITIATIVE (HEMI)

The study looked at one program and its effect on 114 emancipating foster youth between 2009 and 2015. Foster youth in the Higher Education Mentoring Initiative, put in place in 2009, had higher high school graduation rates and post-secondary enrollment, as well as better employment outcomes. Females involved in HEMI also had a lower rate of teen and early-adult pregnancy.

The HEMI program pairs foster children in high school with a mentor to help them graduate high school and move on to an appropriate post-secondary option or sustainable career path. Mentors commit to long-term relationships that involve weekly in-person contact and consistent availability via text, email and phone.



**HEMI PRELIMINARY
RETURN-ON-INVESTMENT (ROI)**

248%

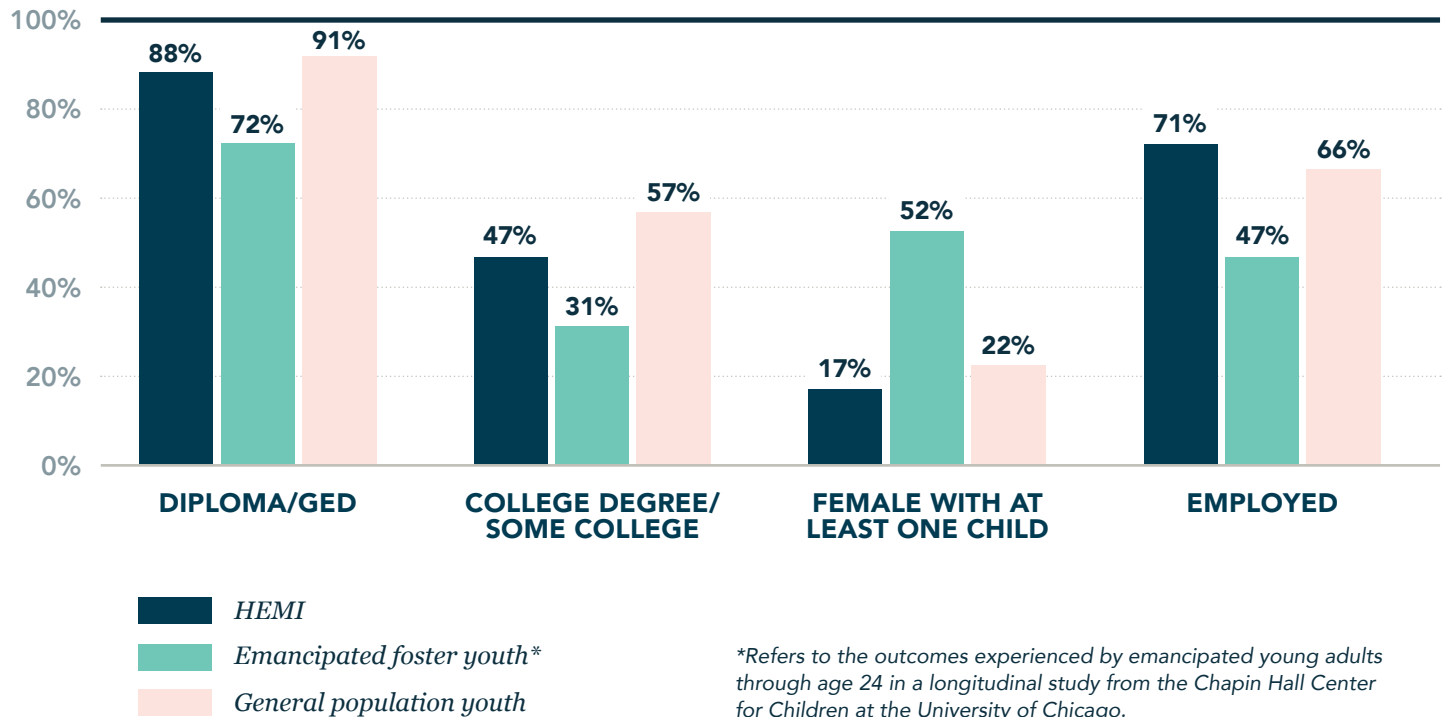
**HEMI REDUCED
SOCIAL COST BY:**

\$767,800

HEMI OUTCOMES

(2009–2015)

After completing its sixth year, HEMI has promising preliminary results among the young adults who engaged.



“We know we can change lives when we invest in these young people at an early age.”

“We know we can change lives when we invest in these young people at an early age,” Weir said. “This study shows with the proper intervention we can make a positive outcome for our foster youth. HEMI is a promising intervention that respects the youth’s readiness to engage and participate. There may be stops and starts along the way, but they never give up — just as we would never give up on our own children. We have always been committed to doing everything we can, as early as we can, to help our young people flourish into adulthood.”

OPPORTUNITIES



"WE HAVE VOICES.
WE DESERVE TO BE HEARD.
WE DESERVE A FUTURE."

— HEMI participant

County-level support for foster youth is expensive, both while they are in custody and after they emancipate. Without significant intervention and up-front investment, a community can expect to see social services costs rise and the productivity gap widen as those former foster youth age into adulthood, middle age and beyond. This full cost of foster children represents a major expense for Hamilton County. With custody and daily involvement in a foster youth's life, the county has a unique opportunity to reverse this course and affect changes that create stronger children, stronger adults and a stronger community.

The investment should start before a child even enters the system. Everything from a neighbor stepping in to help an overwhelmed mother, to a local employer providing economic opportunities to strengthen a father's chance of providing for his son's needs, can play a part in preventing child abuse and neglect. Prevention programs that support overwhelmed parents—parenting classes, domestic violence education, mental health and substance abuse treatment—must all be part of the labyrinth of support available to families.

Once a family becomes involved in the child welfare system, the county has an opportunity to work with that family and child to develop a blueprint for success. This often requires intensive, in-home treatment and other supportive programs that strengthen the family from the inside out. These programs are expensive, but given the possibility of long-term costs for unsuccessful outcomes, up-front investment makes economic sense.

In fact, the system itself needs investment. From the necessary staff, to the training and support for those staff, to data systems and other technology, there are many ways public investment will improve the chances of positive outcomes for foster youth.

Finally, for the young adults who do emancipate, it is necessary that multifaceted interventions, such as the Higher Education Mentoring Initiative, be available to emancipating young adults to help them chart a path toward self-sufficiency.

FOR THE COMPLETE REPORT AND FAQs VISIT:
www.hcjfs.org/emancipationimpact

REPORT PARTNERS



Hamilton County Job and Family Services administers state, federal, and local programs designed to help those in need and help families work toward self sufficiency. The agency has served Hamilton County since 1947. Today, the approximately 800 employees that work for the agency serve hundreds of thousands of Hamilton County residents.



Ohio Reach improves post-secondary outcomes for foster care youth and alumni through leadership, empowerment, advocacy, research and networking (L.E.A.R.N.).



harmonyproject

Harmony Project is an innovative private nonprofit foundation established in 2001 to improve the health, social and emotional development, and education of at-risk children and youth in Greater Cincinnati. Harmony Project has backed evidence-based programs and promising new initiatives within existing organizations and has incubated new organizations that encourage at-risk youth to become confident, accomplished, empathetic and inclusive adults.

EconomicsCenter

The Economics Center helps our clients make better policy and economic development decisions. Our dynamic approach and critical data analysis empower leaders to respond to changing economic conditions, strengthen local economies and improve the quality of life for their communities.

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