



# Family Keys

## Return on Innovation

### STORY PROBLEM

**Data when paired with stories can be more impactful.**

Consider creating a story problem to illustrate the return on investment for your county.

Here is a sample story problem using 2025 Wisconsin statewide child welfare data and rental data from [www.rentdata.org/states/wisconsin/2025](http://www.rentdata.org/states/wisconsin/2025).



**Q: Is it less expensive to pay for foster care or to rent a house for a family of 4 ?**

**A. We are paying for housing....the only difference is who we are paying it to.**

Calculating the cost of homelessness is difficult to quantify on an emotional level. **You can't put a dollar amount on the feeling of safety, relief, and comfort a person feels by being stably housed.** The amounts below did not take into consideration other costs that are incurred when a child is placed in out of home care; such as court costs and salaries for child welfare professionals. They also did not factor in the costs related to the unhoused parent.

The *National Prevention Science Coalition to Improve Lives* published a [fact sheet](#) in January 2016 and updated in April 2025, that explains how hospitalization, medical treatment, incarceration, police intervention, and emergency shelter expenses cost taxpayers' large sums of money.

#### *The Math*

Average foster care rate x median length of stay in out of home care = \$15,165/child x 4 children = **\$60,660**

Fair market rent on an average 3-bedroom apartment = **\$15,816/year**

**Answer:** You could pay rent for nearly **4 years** or pay foster care for **15 months** (median length of stay in OHC).

The Department of Children and Families is an equal opportunity employer and service provider. If you have a disability and need to access services, receive information in an alternate format, or need information translated to another language, please call the Division of Safety and Permanence at (608) 266-8787. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind or speech disabled can use the free Wisconsin Relay Service (WRS) – 711 to contact the department.





# Family Keys

## Return on Innovation

### RETURN ON INNOVATION

- **[Fact Sheet: Cost of Homelessness \(npscoalition.org\) from 2016](#)**

“Hospitalization, medical treatment, incarceration, police intervention, and emergency shelter expenses can add up quickly, making homelessness surprisingly expensive for municipalities and taxpayers.”

- **[CBA-Report.pdf \(bkrhc.org\)](#)**

The costs of homelessness are high, both in human and financial terms. Local public and private non-profit agencies spend about \$25 million annually to feed, care for, shelter, and house 4,500 homeless and formerly homeless people, or about \$5,551 per person. Federal and state funds pay for 75% of the cost of these programs. City and County taxpayers and private donors pick up the remaining 25% (about \$6 million).

- **[Alia report on unseen costs of FC.](#)**

Their report shows that the more resources spent performing services in the traditional way, the greater the negative return on investment. “Outcomes” are not just numbers; they represent real people who have been traumatized by the costly services and interventions used to protect them”.

- **[Institute for Family](#)**

“Stories are how humans build connections, develop empathy, and create understanding. Sharing and listening to other people’s stories allows us to share our culture, oral history, fears, failures, loves, and daily life.” [Why Storytelling Matters \(And Why We Need Yours\) - Institute for Family](#)

- **[Addressing Economic Hardship Key to Preventing Child Welfare System Involvement – Chapin Hall.](#)**

