



Indian River County Children's Services

Return on Investment Update



Return on Investment 2025

Research Update 2026

The research highlighted in last year's return on investment report continues to reflect well-established findings about the value of investing in children and families. Across a wide range of programs including early childhood education, family support services, youth development initiatives, and health interventions, research consistently estimates return ranging from approximately \$2.7 to \$16 for every \$1 invested. These findings remain widely used by researchers and policymakers and continue to provide a strong foundation for understanding the long-term economic impact of these investments. To ensure this report reflects the most current information available, several updated data points and national research findings have been included and are linked to the sections that follow.

These investments also support today's workforce and local Indian River economy. When our families have access to reliable childcare, parenting support, health services, and youth development programs, our parents are better able to remain employed, maintain consistent work schedules, and contribute to the local economy. At the same time, children who grow up with strong support are more likely to succeed in school, develop career skills, and eventually enter the workforce themselves. In this way, investments in children and families strengthen the current workforce while also developing the skilled workforce and taxpayers of tomorrow.

The following sections highlight updated research findings that align with the priority areas identified in the Children's Services Needs Assessment: Health and Well Being, Nurturing Families and Communities, Success in School and Life. Together, these areas reflect the critical support that help children thrive, strengthen families, and contribute to the long-term economic stability and quality of life within the community.

Health and Well Being

Research continues to show that improving maternal and child health produces measurable long-term benefits for families, communities, and the workforce. Preterm birth remains a significant public health and economic concern, with national data continuing to track the long-term health and economic impact associated with early births. Preventive support such as prenatal care, maternal health services, and early childhood health interventions improve birth outcomes and reduce long term healthcare costs.

This support also helps parents remain active in the workforce. When families have access to reliable health services and early support during pregnancy and early childhood, parents are better able to maintain employment, avoid disruptions caused by medical complications, and provide stable environments for their children.

Source:

March of Dimes PeriStats <https://www.marchofdimes.org/peristats>

Nurturing Families and Communities

Research continues to confirm that strong family support and prevention services reduce the long-term societal costs associated with child maltreatment and family instability. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

estimates that the lifetime economic burden of child abuse and neglect in the United States is approximately \$592 billion, reflecting healthcare, child welfare services, education impacts, and lost productivity.

Programs that strengthen families, provide parenting support, and connect families with community resources help prevent abuse and neglect while improving outcomes for children. These services also stabilize families so parents can remain engaged in the workforce and maintain consistent employment.

Source:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <https://www.cdc.gov/child-abuse-neglect/about/index.html>

Success in School and Life

Research continues to show that supporting young people through education, mentoring, and workforce pathways produces significant long term economic benefits. National data indicates that approximately 10.9 percent of youth ages 16 to 24 are disconnected from school or work, representing more than 4 million young people across the United States.

Studies also estimate that the lifetime societal cost of a disconnected young person can approach \$1 million when considering lost earnings, reduced tax revenue, and increased reliance on social services. Programs that provide mentoring, career exploration, academic support, and workforce development help young people stay connected to school and employment pathways.

These programs contribute directly to the future workforce by preparing young people with the skills and experiences needed to enter high demand careers and contribute to the local economy.

Sources:

Measure of America <https://measureofamerica.org/youth-disconnection-2024/>

RAND Corporation <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA4207-1.html>

Early Childhood Development

Research continues to demonstrate that high quality early childhood programs generate some of the strongest returns on public investment. Long term studies of early childhood interventions show an estimated 13 percent annual return on investment through improved education outcomes, higher lifetime earnings, and reduced social service costs.

Early childhood programs also support the current workforce by allowing parents to participate in the labor market while their children receive safe, developmentally appropriate care and learning opportunities.

Source:

Heckman Equation <https://heckmanequation.org>

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