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Guest Column
Greg Hartmann
Hamilton County Commissioner
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Higher Education for Foster Youth: A pathway to self-empowerment and success

High school aged foster children heading back to school this fall need your help. Your willingness to teach the value of higher education to a foster child can make an incredible difference in the life of our community's most vulnerable population.

Hamilton County's Higher Education Mentoring Initiative (HEMI) pairs foster youth in high school with a higher education mentor. A higher education mentor is different from a foster parent. These mentors focus specifically on generating awareness of higher education as an option once a foster child has completed high school and leaves foster care. The relationship encourages successful completion of high school; application to an institution of higher education; career goal setting; and securing self-sustainable employment and income.

Statistics for foster children who turn 18 and "age-out" of the system are grim. Nationally, over 25 percent of children in foster care are incarcerated within the first two years of leaving the system; 20 percent become homeless; and only 3 percent earn college degrees compared to 28 percent of the general population.

These statistics drove me to assemble a partnership with Job and Family Services, the University of Cincinnati, and the Foster Child Enrichment Council, to answer this need in our community. Through higher education, we will provide our foster youth with a pathway to a lifetime of self-empowerment and success.

This is the pilot year of HEMI and we're seeking adults to spend roughly two hours of time weekly to mentor a foster child through their senior year of high school and beyond in their pursuit of higher education. With community support this program can expand to connect these students with a HEMI mentor as early as their freshman year of high school.

Interested? Contact my office at 513-946-4405 or the HEMI program coordinator Annie Dick at 513-556-4368 or annie.dick@uc.edu.