LINC Commission Meeting

July 16, 2012

The Mable Washington Learning Center was dedicated and opened to the public on June 29. The center will provide educational opportunities to youth and adults in the community. It was developed through a partnership between LINC, Palestine Neighborhood Development Corporation and the City of Kansas City, Mo. The center is located at 3326 Indiana, Kansas City, MO.

LINC
Local Investment Commission
www.kclinc.org

Local Investment Commission (LINC) Vision

Our Shared Vision

A caring community that builds on its strengths to provide meaningful opportunities for children, families and individuals to achieve self-sufficiency, attain their highest potential, and contribute to the public good.

Our Mission

To provide leadership and influence to engage the Kansas City Community in creating the best service delivery system to support and strengthen children, families and individuals, holding that system accountable, and changing public attitudes towards the system.

Our Guiding Principles

1. COMPREHENSIVENESS: Provide ready access to a full array of effective services.
2. PREVENTION: Emphasize "front-end" services that enhance development and prevent problems, rather than "back-end" crisis intervention.
3. OUTCOMES: Measure system performance by improved outcomes for children and families, not simply by the number and kind of services delivered.
4. INTENSITY: Offering services to the needed degree and in the appropriate time.
5. PARTICIPANT INVOLVEMENT: Use the needs, concerns, and opinions of individuals who use the service delivery system to drive improvements in the operation of the system.
6. NEIGHBORHOODS: Decentralize services to the places where people live, wherever appropriate, and utilize services to strengthen neighborhood capacity.
7. FLEXIBILITY AND RESPONSIVENESS: Create a delivery system, including programs and reimbursement mechanisms, that are sufficiently flexible and adaptable to respond to the full spectrum of child, family and individual needs.
8. COLLABORATION: Connect public, private and community resources to create an integrated service delivery system.
9. STRONG FAMILIES: Work to strengthen families, especially the capacity of parents to support and nurture the development of their children.
10. RESPECT AND DIGNITY: Treat families, and the staff who work with them, in a respectful and dignified manner.
11. INTERDEPENDENCE/MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY: Balance the need for individuals to be accountable and responsible with the obligation of community to enhance the welfare of all citizens.
12. CULTURAL COMPETENCY: Demonstrate the belief that diversity in the historical, cultural, religious and spiritual values of different groups is a source of great strength.
13. CREATIVITY: Encourage and allow participants and staff to think and act innovatively, to take risks, and to learn from their experiences and mistakes.
14. COMPASSION: Display an unconditional regard and a caring, non-judgmental attitude toward, participants that recognizes their strengths and empowers them to meet their own needs.
15. HONESTY: Encourage and allow honesty among all people in the system.

Monday, July 16, 2012 | 4 – 6 pm
Kauffman Foundation
4801 Rockhill Rd.
Kansas City, Mo. 64110

Agenda

I. **Welcome and Announcements**

II. **Approvals**
   a. **June minutes (motion)**

III. **Superintendent's Reports**

IV. **Google Study – Kansas City Digital Access**
   a. **Mike Burke and Ray Daniels**
      cochairs Bistate Innovation Team

V. **Child welfare**
   a. **Midwest Foster Care & Adoption Association**
      i. **Lori Ross, Executive Director**

VI. **Other**
   a. **Financial report**
   b. **LINCWorks Update**
   c. **SEBT update**

VII. **Adjournment**

THE LOCAL INVESTMENT COMMISSION – JUNE 18, 2012

The Local Investment Commission met at the Kauffman Foundation, 4801 Rockhill Rd., Kansas City, Mo. Chairman **Landon Rowland** presided. Commissioners attending were:

Sharon Cheers
Steve Dunn
SuEllen Fried
Bart Hakan
Richard Hibschman
Judy Hunt
Tom Lewin
Sandy Mayer (for Mike Sanders)
Mary Kay McPhee
Richard Morris
David Ross
David Rock
Bailus Tate

A motion to approve the May 21, 2012, LINC Commission meeting minutes was passed unanimously.

LINC staff **Steve Winburn** introduced Missouri Children's Division Jackson County Director **Tanya Keys**, who reported on the division's efforts to increase the number of foster home placements for children in state care and engage community partners in development of strategies to prevent the need for children to enter state care. Discussion followed.

Two LINC-produced videos, one on Drumm Farm Center for Children and one on Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Association (MFCAA), were shown.

Drumm Farm Director **Brad Smith** reported on the center's history and the recent restoration of Swinney Hall and other efforts to increase the quality and capacity to serve foster children and families. MFCAA services are located on the Drumm Farm campus.

Winburn reported on LINC's partnerships with the Missouri Division of Youth Services and Children's Division recognized the LINC staff who serve on the LINC initiative to help foster youth make a successful transition to adulthood.

Discussion followed.

Superintendents' Report

- **Ralph Teran** (Superintendent, Grandview School District) reported the Grandview, Center and Hickman Mills superintendents celebrated their longstanding partnerships on the occasion of Marge Williams' retirement. He also reported on the need for partners to continually work to assist foster youth and others in the district.
- **Bob Bartman** (Superintendent, Center School District) reported the Center School District has received 100 transfer requests from families of students in the Kansas City Public Schools.
- **Todd White** (Superintendent, North Kansas City School District) reported 9,000 students are enrolled in the district summer school program, and the district is building additional classrooms to accommodate rising student population.
- **Everlyn Williams** (Superintendent, Hickman Mills School District) reported 2,100 students are enrolled in the district summer school program, which is supported by the LINC Before & After School program. Five Hickman Mills students participated in the Girls in Construction program sponsored by J.E. Dunn.
- **John Ruddy** (Assistant Superintendent, Fort Osage School District) reported the school year ended and summer school will begin this week. LINC will provide summer

childcare for the district in July. Over 10 weeks this summer the district will carry out $5 million in bond-funded improvement projects.

- **Marge Williams** (Superintendent, Hickman Mills School District) reported 400 students will graduate from Ruskin High School tonight. Summer school begins June 4.
- **Phillip Hickman** (Principal, Genesis Promise Academy) reported the school's partnership with LINC Caring Communities – particularly through youth development and parent engagement – is helping to close the student achievement gap. He reported the schools virtual academy is helping suspended students stay on track academically.

A LINC-produced video was shown of **Marge Williams** commenting on the importance of collaboration with community organizations for student success.

A motion to approve the nomination of Marge Williams to the LINC Commission was passed unanimously.

LINC Caring Communities supervisor **Steve McClellan** reported Palestine Neighborhood Development Corp. will host the grand opening of the Mable Washington Center on June 29. The center will offer afterschool programming, GED preparatory classes, computer training, job skills development, and the Urban Agriculture Center. **Barbara Johnson** reported on her work to build community gardens with neighborhood youth and residents.

Robyne Stephenson reported on the efforts of Fresh Food Corridor to organize a marketing campaign, assisted by LINC, to inform neighborhood residents about the availability of locally raised fresh food in the area bounded by Woodland and Troost, 31st Street and 37th Street.

Gayle A. Hobbs reported **Gary Stangler** is ill. His contact information is available from the LINC office.

SuEllen Fried reported Alvin Ailey Camp is serving 102 at-risk students in the Kansas City Public Schools this summer. The camp culminates in a July 11 performance at the Kauffman Performing Arts Center.

Sharon Cheers reported on the grand opening last weekend of the Black Archives of Mid-America, and on the memorial service for parent leader and former president of the Kansas City school board **Marilyn Simmons**.

EXTREME RECRUITMENT

Issue Addressed

In the St. Louis area, nearly 500 children are waiting for an adoptive family. These are legal orphans who, on average, are 16 years old. Not surprisingly, most "age out" of the system at 18 or 21 years old.

The *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth* reports that of individuals ages 22-24 who aged out of foster care:

- 24.3% experienced homelessness since exiting foster care
- 24.4% had no high school diploma or GED
- 2.5% completed a 4 year degree
- 48% were employed during the study
- 65% of females found themselves pregnant since leaving care
- 64% of males had been arrested since age 18

Extreme Recruitment program brings hope to these youth. In little more than the first year of Extreme Recruitment, 60 youth were served. Of these 60, 42 (70%) were matched with a safe, appropriate adoptive family.

This program is so powerful that we are convinced that it will change the child welfare system in St. Louis. Locally, the entire child welfare system—the Children's Division, private agencies, and the courts—are excited about Extreme Recruitment's results.

Currently, Extreme Recruitment is involved in a partnership under a federal grant to evaluate Extreme Recruitment's effectiveness. The evaluation utilizes a control group and random assignment. The evaluation period will end in the Fall of 2013, and we hope to share the outcomes shortly thereafter.

Program Overview

Silly as it may sound, Extreme Recruitment was inspired by the television show Extreme Home Makeover. This program is an exciting race against time to build a house in just a week by coordinating hundreds of professionals and volunteers. Likewise, Extreme Recruitment is a race to find an adoptive home for a child in a fraction of the time it would normally take (12-20 weeks vs. 12-24 months).

We work exclusively with the hardest-to-place children: ages 10-18, sibling groups, African-American children, and youth with emotional, developmental, or behavioral concerns. Extreme Recruitment is successful for ANY child in foster care because it:

1. requires weekly, intensive meetings between the child's professional team members for 12-20 weeks
2. demands concentrated support from child welfare supervisors
3. focuses on preparing the youth for adoption, including their mental health and educational needs

Extreme Recruitment is operated by the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition and is made possible by grant number 90C010391 from the Children's Bureau. These contents are solely the responsibility of the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Children's Bureau, ACYF, ACF, or HHS.

The added ingredient that makes Extreme Recruitment so effective is our private investigator. Originally, we tried to do the investigation work ourselves, but our contact rate with relatives was a dismal 23%. Within two weeks of hiring an investigator, the contact rate skyrocketed to 80%.

Our investigator finds relatives through internet tools, court databases, and good old-fashioned gum-shoe detective work. Many times, he will find a grandmother or an aunt who will say, “Thank God you are here. I have been waiting years for you to find me.” Other times, he must use persuasion and tenacity to convince relatives to meet with him.

Program Achievements

Extreme Recruitment’s goal is to:

- Match 90% of youth with a network of safe, appropriate adults
- Match 70% of youth with an adoptive family

Here are a few kids who have benefited from Extreme Recruitment:

- **Sherry** came into foster care 11 years ago. Despite the challenges of being in the system, Sherry held her own at school and was a favorite employee at a local grocery store. Our **Extreme Recruitment** program located Sherry’s older sister and now they are living together. Sherry’s grades have skyrocketed and she is even making plans for college. Sherry's deep longing for family has been fulfilled.
- **Keith** came into foster care at age five. Now 15 years old, he has lived a difficult life. In February, our **Extreme Recruitment** investigator found Keith’s grandfather. His grandfather, who is former military, is an exact replica of Keith in both looks and manner. He is already 100% committed to Keith, and they talk on the phone every day. In less than two months, Keith’s entire demeanor has changed, "Before I thought I had no family to visit. Now I have my grandpa."
- **Serena**. Coalition staff traveled to Minneapolis to locate family, and it worked! They found Sharon, aunt of 14-year-old Serena. Aunt Sharon lost connection with Serena ten years ago, after her niece entered the St. Louis foster care system. Greeting our **Extreme Recruitment** team with a big hug and tears of joy, Aunt Sharon exclaimed "I have been so worried about her!" The visit was great, and Aunt Sharon's strength, wisdom, and commitment were obvious. Describing herself as the "glue of the family," Aunt Sharon will do all that she can to bring Serena home.

To Learn More About Extreme Recruitment

Contact: Gayle Flavin, Director of Training and Implementation, Extreme Recruitment
Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition
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Saint Louis, Missouri 63144
o 800.FOSTER.3 (314.367.8373)
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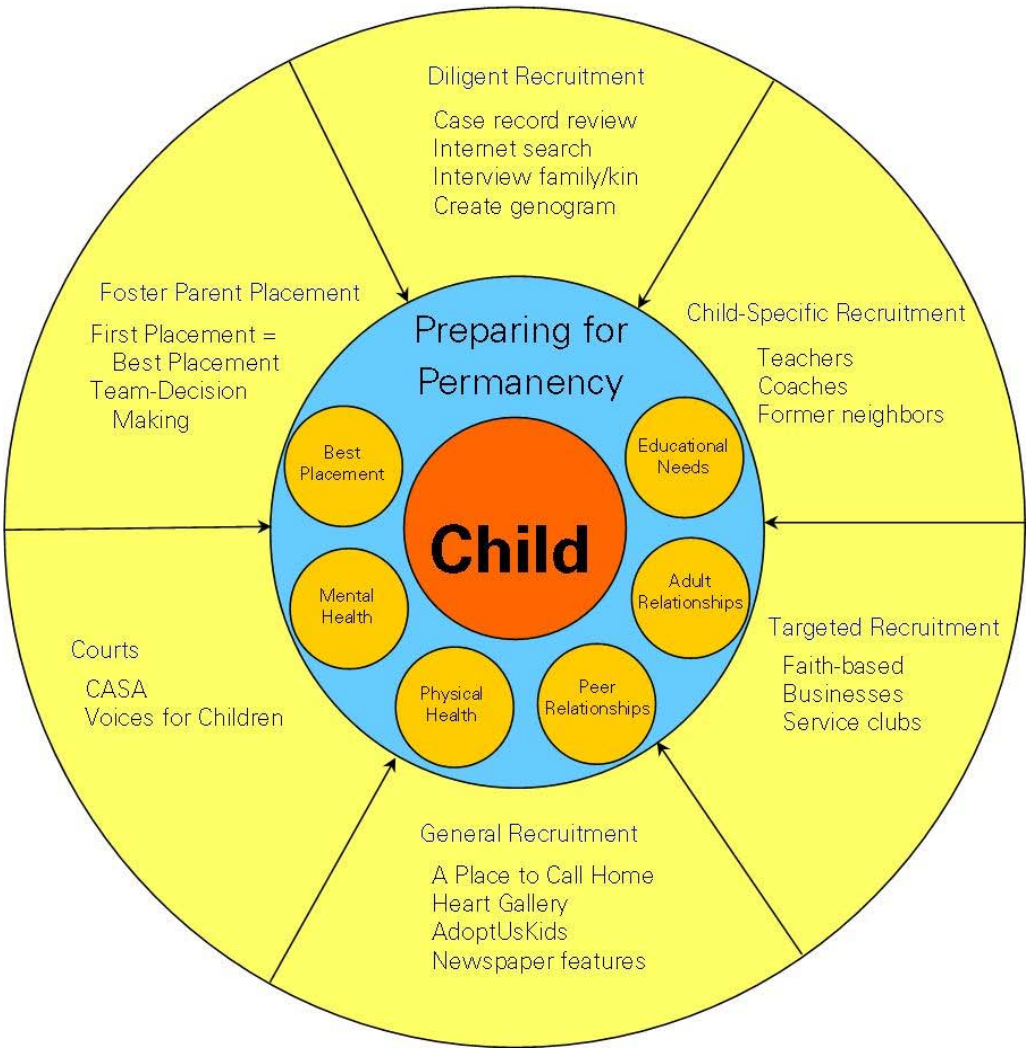
EXTREME Recruitment™



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Children's Bureau

TIME

Monday, Jan. 10, 2011

Foster Care: Extreme Edition

By Curtis Sittenfeld / St. Louis

In many ways, Claire was a typical 14-year-old. Her favorite store was Forever 21, her favorite food was macaroni and cheese, and her favorite TV show was *Bad Girls Club*. As a ninth-grader living in St. Louis, she was a member of her school dance team, and she was (of course) on Facebook. A pretty and stylish girl, Claire was a strong student whose long-term goal was to become a lawyer.

In other ways, however, Claire's life was decidedly not typical, and the odds were seriously stacked against her. At age 6, she entered foster care after evidence of abuse and neglect surfaced in her home. She then lived in six different settings, including foster homes and group residences; her current home was a facility. Although she navigated those challenges with remarkable grace, her prospects were, statistically speaking, bleak. She would "age out" of the foster-care system when she turned 18, at which point she would have to fight to keep her head above water. There are nearly half a million American children in foster care; one 2007 survey found that of the young adults who age out, about half don't complete high school, about a third are arrested, and almost as many struggle with homelessness. Only 38% of those working at age 18 are employed a year after leaving foster care, and among the women, roughly half are pregnant within 12 to 18 months. (See more about the epidemic of teen pregnancy in foster care.)

But in November 2009, Claire got a lucky break: her case was randomly selected to be part of an innovative program known as Extreme Recruitment. Pioneered by a 23-person St. Louis — based agency called the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition, Extreme Recruitment seeks out the foster children who are the hardest to find homes for — kids older than 10, kids with special needs, sibling groups and African Americans — and not only matches them with permanent adoptive families but also does so in a fraction of the time such matches usually take. Success depends on close coordination of a professional team — one that includes detectives who track down enough potential adoptive relatives to fill a small dance hall. Although half of all foster kids wait in custody for one to five years, Extreme Recruitment aims for a match in 12 to 20 weeks; instead of finding "forever families" for 40% of the children they work with, as the agency did before 2008, Extreme Recruitment finds families for 70%.

"We think it's the best thing since sliced bread," the coalition's executive director, Melanie Scheetz, says of Extreme Recruitment. "But until we can prove it as an evidence-based practice, it's just that nice little program that people are doing out in St. Louis." In 2008 the coalition partnered with the state of Missouri on a five-year federal grant to compare Extreme Recruitment's family-matching methods with foster-care business as usual — an evaluation Scheetz welcomes. As interest in the program rises and the coalition hosts visitors from around the country eager to observe and replicate its methods, Extreme Recruitment might remain just a nice little program out in St. Louis, or it might pave the way to revolutionize the foster-care system in America. (See the story of one family who adopted a teenager.)

The Need for Speed

Extreme recruitment came about while its creator was waiting for *Desperate Housewives* to come on TV. That is the "very embarrassing but very true" story, as Scheetz describes it, of how she decided to dramatically shift the way her agency approached finding homes for children. She was sitting in front of the television in her family's living room on a Sunday night in March 2008, impatiently watching the last few minutes of *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*. "How can they build a house that fast?" she remembers wondering. "If they can do that — and they do it not because they use any new technologies or processes; they just coordinate their massive team of professionals and volunteers in a highly effective way — the question is why can't we do that too in finding homes for kids?"

Of the 424,000 American children currently in foster care, according to the Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, close to a quarter will remain in care for more than three years. At the coalition prior to Extreme Recruitment, a social worker typically checked in with a child's caseworker once a month, and the various other players — the educational advocate, the therapist, the court-appointed special advocate — were rarely in the same room.

See a brief history of the American family.

But under the Extreme Recruitment model, team members are in constant contact, with weekly 30-minute meetings propelled by checklists of action items. Among the team members are the coalition's not-so-secret weapons: two full-time private investigators employed by the agency who track down dozens of members of a child's biological family. The old assumption was that if a child's parents couldn't care for her, everyone else in

the family would have a similarly negative influence — that the apple didn't fall far from the tree. The new conventional wisdom is that having contact with family is critical to a child's identity, and if you haven't found any family members who can be a positive influence, then you haven't looked hard enough. "There are," Scheetz says, "lots of apples."

In 2008, George W. Bush signed family finding into federal law as part of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act. While different states have implemented the law at different speeds, within Extreme Recruitment, the significance of family finding can't be overestimated. "We're talking about these kids being reconnected to support systems, family, their roots," says Sheila Suderwalla, a coalition social worker. "For our kids, when they enter foster care, their primary label, their primary identity, is a foster child." But a foster child reconnected to his family becomes Aunt Rita's nephew or Johnny's cousin. "He is someone who's cared about," Suderwalla says. (See TIME's cover story on the crisis of foster care.)

On a practical level, Scheetz says, relatives are likelier than strangers to be unfazed by a kid's special needs. Say a 10-year-old foster child has been diagnosed as bipolar. It's possible that bipolar disorder runs in the family and that the great-grandmother considering adopting the child is already familiar with the condition because her niece has it too. "The family knows how to deal with it," says Scheetz.

Her claims are borne out by a recent Cornell University study showing that of people who take an adoption-preparation course, only 4% of those who do not have a prior connection to a child will ultimately go through with adoption, but a whopping 53% of people with a connection will. As foster-care consultant Kevin Campbell, who is credited with inventing the practice of family finding, puts it, "Before giving kids to strangers, we should be making sure they don't have family members who can take care of them. Children and young people need to be afforded the dignity of knowing their family story — where they come from, the strengths and challenges in the family. For me, it's a human-rights issue." (See more about the heartbreak of adoption.)

Rather than following the steps to permanent placement sequentially — for example, identifying a family for a child and then making sure the child is mentally and physically ready to live with that family — Extreme Recruitment pursues all the preparations for adoption simultaneously. It also pursues multiple adoptive families at once instead of waiting for one not to work out before moving on. "What happens if we find more than one preadoptive family?" Scheetz asks. "Great!"

Where once social workers would locate just a handful of relatives per child, these days the social workers and private investigators working in tandem find a minimum of 40 per child, though the number is usually closer to 60. The Internet, especially public databases like publicrecordsnow.com and virtualgumshoe.com has made the job easier, though there's no replacement for old-fashioned pavement pounding. In one extraordinary week, coalition social worker Ian Forber-Pratt and private investigator Russell Smith identified a staggering 113 family members of a child; then Forber-Pratt attended a wake where he found 15 more. For putting faces with the names on a family tree, it turns out, nothing beats a funeral. (See pictures of a diverse group of American teens.)

Finding the Gems

For each child's case, the goal is to find the two individuals who, Scheetz swears, exist in every family: the informant, who knows who lives where, who has been married or divorced or imprisoned and what everyone's phone numbers are; and the family gem, to use Scheetz's term, the cousin or uncle or grandparent who is both emotionally and logistically prepared to open his or her home to a young relative. The sign that he's found the family gem, says Carlos Lopez, one of the coalition's investigators, is when the person opens the door, hears why he's there and immediately says, "I'm so glad you've found me. What do I need to do?"

See TIME's cover story on the crisis of foster care.

Regularly, Lopez and Suderwalla, who work together often, must apologize to family members who feel they have been failed by the foster-care system and quite possibly believe that the child ended up in foster care against their will. In one instance, a great-aunt berated Lopez and Suderwalla for three hours before she was willing to divulge any family information. "She had to grieve," Suderwalla says.

Despite the challenges, Suderwalla and Lopez both say they love their jobs. A former juvenile detective, Lopez was accustomed to encountering kids, often the same ones over and over, when they were in trouble and being unable to truly address the underlying problems in their lives. Now, he says, he can make a difference. (See photos of the crisis nursery providing relief in Minneapolis.)

It was by knocking on doors that Lopez found Stephanie, 31, whose ex-husband is Claire's cousin. When Claire's file came to the coalition, it contained the names of six relatives. Claire's Extreme Recruitment team managed to find over 80 more, one of whom was Stephanie. (Claire is still a ward of the state, and Claire and Stephanie are not their real names, though they are pseudonyms the two picked for themselves.)

A police officer who was recently promoted to detective and a divorced mother of three, Stephanie hadn't seen Claire for close to a decade but

remembered her well. "She used to come around, and she was the cutest little girl," Stephanie says. "She always had these long beautiful ponytails."

When Lopez appeared out of the blue and told Stephanie the coalition was gathering information about Claire's family, Stephanie immediately wanted to know more. After a series of conversations with a coalition social worker and extensive prayer — "I'm a woman of the faith," Stephanie says — she decided she wanted to become Claire's adoptive mother. "She's family," Stephanie says. "And I feel like I have the resources. Why not?" (See more about child abuse investigations that don't help kids.)

In early August, shortly after her 15th birthday, Claire moved into Stephanie's rental town house, sharing a room with Stephanie's 8-year-old daughter. The plan is that after the required six-month period, Stephanie will legally adopt Claire. Though Claire is related by blood to Stephanie's children, Claire and Stephanie are not biologically related. But they both say this makes no difference. Stephanie maintains a friendly relationship with her ex-husband and several of her former in-laws and is eager for Claire to see them frequently. And one of these days, Claire will get to meet Stephanie's brother, who works in New York City as a lawyer — the profession Claire hopes to pursue.

Although they reconnected less than a year ago, it's hard to pinpoint the differences between Stephanie and Claire and other mother-daughter duos. Stephanie brags about Claire's 3.875 grade-point average, chides her for something she posted on Facebook (which neither of them, despite much pleading, would divulge to a reporter) and shares Claire's fondness for reading the Bible. Claire was quiet as a little girl, Stephanie recalls, but "she's very outspoken now. I love that, though, 'cause she's just like me." (See "Should Race Be a Factor in Adoptions?")

Not all Extreme Recruitment cases unfold as smoothly as Claire's: 50% of the planned first matches don't pan out, leading the team to look for a second, third or fourth match. "It's not magic," Scheetz says. "You've got to keep trying." In some cases, the team simply can't find any appropriate family members willing to consider adoption, though a nonfamily adoption isn't deemed a failure. Ideally, the child still develops relationships with family members without living with them and receives the family's blessing for a nonkinship adoption, thereby surmounting the uneasiness about disloyalty that can cause teens in particular to claim they don't want to be adopted.

Even in Claire's case, there are many unknowns. But the evidence so far suggests that Stephanie is exactly the sort of family gem whose existence Extreme Recruitment is built on and who gives credence to Scheetz's belief that many more such gems are out there waiting to be discovered by those willing to search. The program is being watched closely — and in some cases copied — by family-service professionals across the country. Using investigators is "a stroke of genius," says Rana O'Connor, who works for the Maine division of Casey Family Services, which serves 4,000 children in seven states annually. "Detectives have access to information or skills that social workers don't necessarily have." O'Connor plans to hire three full-time private investigators this year and mirror the intense focus and compressed timetable that Extreme Recruitment has developed. All of which means that this big program from a small agency could not only change the way foster care works in America but could also do so very quickly — and if it does, well, won't that be fitting?

Sittenfeld is the author of the novels Prep *and* American Wife *(Random House)*

See TIME's Top 10 of Everything of 2010.

See TIME's best pictures of 2010.

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January 31, 2010

A Determined Quest to Bring Adoptive Ties to Foster Teenagers

By ERIK ECKHOLM

ST. LOUIS — After a day of knocking on doors chasing fleeting leads, Carlos Lopez and his partner finally heard welcome words: Yes, a resident confirmed, the man they were seeking lived in this house and would be home that evening.

Mr. Lopez, a former police detective, now does gumshoe work for what he calls a more fulfilling cause: tracking down long-lost relatives of teenagers languishing in foster care, in desperate need of family ties and in danger of becoming rootless adults. That recent day, he was hoping to find the father of a boy who had lived in 16 different foster homes since 1995. The boy did not remember his mother, who had long since disappeared.

Finding an adoptive parent for older children with years in foster care is known in child welfare circles as the toughest challenge. Typically, their biological parents abused or neglected them and had parental rights terminated. Relatives may not know where the children are, or even that they exist. And the supply of saints in the general public, willing to adopt teenagers shaken by years of trauma and loss, is limited.

The intensive searches in St. Louis reflect a growing national shift toward relatives as caretakers, a quest that has often been limited by a seeming scarcity of known suitable kin. But scores of foster and adoption agencies around the country have found that assertive efforts relying on the Internet, the telephone, advertisements and, in a some cases like this one, door-to-door questioning by full-time investigators, can turn up dozens of relatives for almost any child. Many of them turn out to be willing to help nieces, nephews and grandchildren they had never seen.

“The lost relatives are a largely untapped resource for adoption,” said Melanie Scheetz, director of the nonprofit Foster and Adoptive Care Coalition here, which employs Mr. Lopez. “The system has overlooked all these amazing, strong people who are out there and willing to help.”

The potential of such searches was first established about a decade ago by Kevin Campbell, a former head of a charity in Washington State. In his initial work, mainly using computer databases, Mr. Campbell located 40 to 150 relatives each for most children in his program, reaching as far as grandparents’ siblings.

“Some relatives recoil when contacted,” he said; the surprise calls can rekindle ugly family histories. “But many want to help and are willing to consider adoption.”

Many foster children are intensely curious about their biological families, said Mr. Campbell, who is now a

consultant and trains agencies in a six-stage strategy of counseling and searches known as Family Finding. But the children also must be prepared to learn unpleasant facts.

“People have a right to know the truth about their families,” he said. “We work with youths to get answers, knowing that some of the answers may not be hopeful.”

Efforts to help foster teenagers, including those in St. Louis, have been widely supported by grants from Wendy’s Wonderful Kids, created by the founder of the fast food chain.

In the St. Louis area, at any given time some 400 foster children ages 10 and older whose parents’ rights were terminated are eligible for adoption. With a $2 million federal grant and private aid, the Foster and Adoptive Care Coalition has begun unusually intense 12- to 20-week searches for family connections and potential adopters, which it calls Extreme Recruitment. Of 56 cases last year, 90 percent were connected with a relative and 70 percent were matched with adoptive parents, most but not all of them relatives, Ms. Scheetz said.

The pull of blood ties affected Robert Jackson, a 53-year-old meat packer across the Mississippi River in Fairview, Ill. He had not known that his troubled younger brother had fathered two children in St. Louis who soon ended up in foster care, with the parents’ rights terminated by a court. By chance, about two years ago he saw an advertisement in a local newspaper for potential adoptive parents that featured a picture of Charles, now 13, and Charlotte, now 12.

Mr. Jackson did a double take: the boy bore an uncanny resemblance to his brother, the girl resembled a sister, and Charles and Charlotte were family names. After confirming his suspicion, Mr. Jackson recalled, “I thought, ‘We’ve got to bring them back into the family.’ ”

He and his wife, Maxine, went to see the children and started the adoption process. Of that first meeting with his uncle, Charles said, “I thought he really looked like me.”

After his adoption, recalled Liz Johnson, a social worker and “recruiter” with the coalition here, Charles said to her: “I’m a real boy now. I’m not a boy in foster care anymore.”

While the outlook for these two seems bright, their case shows the potential complexity of such transitions. The children had the same foster mother for many years and were deeply attached to her, as she was to them, but she would not commit to adoption.

The children chose to move in with their newfound relatives, but suffered emotional turmoil and problems at their new school, which was far more demanding academically than the one they left in St. Louis. They still see a therapist weekly. Causing new heartache, Maxine died of cancer in December, six months after the children moved in.

To speed the process of recruiting parents and preparing children for adoptions, the St. Louis coalition employs Mr. Lopez and one other investigator full time alongside its social workers and starts transitional therapy for children before a parent is located, rather than waiting, as is common.

Many older children in foster care, after years of disappointments and rejections, initially say they do not want to be adopted. While children cannot be forced to accept adoptive parents, counselors help make them

aware of the advantages of permanent legal ties to caring adults.

Teenagers in foster care often learn how to be alone, said Latasha Holt, a 26-year-old cashier and former foster child who is studying to become a parole officer. Ms. Holt described her isolation in high school, when she lived in a group home and was too ashamed to let others know.

“I had friends until the school day ended at 2:15,” she said. “Graduation was extremely emotional for me because I didn’t have anybody there.”

Ms. Holt had to feed her younger siblings when she was only 7 because their mother disappeared for days at a time. The children all ended up in foster care.

Recently, Ms. Holt became the foster parent of her 18-year-old sister, Sharda. A legal adoption is in the works, and in the meantime she made sure that Sharda had a better graduation experience, throwing her a luau-themed surprise party.

The man found recently by Mr. Lopez and his partner, Sheila Suderwalla, a social worker, proved willing to cooperate. That man knew that a girlfriend from his teenage years had borne a boy, but he said he understood he was not the father. However, he agreed to a paternity test and he and his wife said that while they awaited the results, they could at least tell the inquiring boy about his mother.

“They may give us leads to other relatives,” Ms. Suderwalla said. “If nothing else, this will help give the boy a sense of his identity.”

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KansasCity.com
THE KANSAS CITY STAR.
Friday, Jul 6, 2012

A journey from victim to nurturer

By MATT CAMPBELL
The Kansas City Star

The recent news about the girl in the closet was particularly meaningful for Nathan Ross, who has known many young people from broken or abusive homes.

He was one of them.

Ross survived a notorious case that shocked the public just like that of LP, the girl who was rescued from the closet in a Kansas City home. Two of Ross' younger brothers died from their mother's abuse.

But the boy with the emotional scars is now a man of 23 with a mission to help other fragile youths. Ross, formerly Ronald Bass, is building a mentoring program to match compassionate adults with young people separated from their biological parents and to help them navigate their way to normal lives.

"I want every child that has to come to the foster care system to get all the resources I had, to have every chance for success that I had," Ross said. "It shouldn't take murders of your siblings or parents locking you in the closet. It shouldn't take something so horrific before people step up and say you deserve to have a fair chance at life."

Children reaching out for a mentor in Ross' program reveal some things about themselves by filling out a survey:

• What person do you most admire and why?

My Grandma because she has always been there for me and she does not do drugs.

• What are your favorite subjects to read about?

Mysteries, scary books, no sad books.

• What are your favorite subjects in school?

Math, social studies, government.

• What is one goal you have set for the future?

To be successful, to go to college.

Ronald Bass was embraced into the world of foster care, therapy, mentors and adoption after his mother was arrested in 1999. Mary Bass, who starved and otherwise abused her five children, burned two of the boys in scalding bath water in their Kansas City home and then did nothing as they died of infection.

It was a case that appalled Kansas City in much the same way as that of LP, a 10-year-old girl. Her mother, Jacole Prince, is facing criminal charges for allegedly starving her and locking her away in a utility closet.

Ronald Bass and his surviving siblings received a lot of attention because their case was so publicized.

“Everyone kept rooting for me and telling me I could do well,” said Nathan Ross, the name he took to replace his birth one. “When I was having my struggles, my mentor really encouraged me to keep on pursuing my education.

“I had all the resources I needed,” Ross continued, “whereas a lot of these kids, because they’re not seen as important enough in their stories, don’t get the same resources.”

After graduating from Blue Springs High School, Ross enrolled at Northwest Missouri State University intending to pursue a career in theater. But he became interested in public speaking and in motivating others. He left school because he wanted to help other kids going through foster care.

His adoptive mother, Lori Ross, is president of the Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Association. Nathan Ross became director of youth services for that organization and recently began the mentoring program called Compassionate Adult Role-models Encouraging Success (CARES). He is now pursuing a degree in social psychology from Park University.

Ross recruits adults who will serve as role models for youths without the structure of a caseworker or the foster parental role of a disciplinarian. One of the first things kids in the foster system say is they are tired of adults who always seem to have an agenda.

Instead, mentors go to the movies with them or the park, or just hang out and talk.

“Real-life conversations start to happen that way,” Ross said. “Having an adult figure show them this is what life can be like really motivates them.”

Studies show that these kids, with mentors, are less likely to drop out of school or to fall into drugs or alcohol.

Ross has already matched about 20 volunteer mentors with youths living either in a foster care situation or in a group home. One volunteer is Lauren Williams, 33, a married Lee's Summit woman with no children who became interested in foster kids when her workplace organized a luggage drive for them.

"Foster children move a lot," she explained, "and they move their belongings, usually, in garbage bags."

Williams and a half dozen other volunteer mentors went through a Saturday training session with Ross, learning what would be expected of them. The primary requisite is a commitment to stay with their mentee for at least a year. Many foster kids have been rejected so often they're afraid to build relationships.

Williams was matched with a 17-year-old girl living in a group home with her 1-year-old daughter. The teen's biological mother is legally barred from contact with her. The girl is also separated from her younger sibling.

It's a tough road. But this girl looks ahead to her senior year in high school and aspires to be a lawyer. Williams plans to accompany her on campus visits to the University of Missouri-Kansas City and Lincoln University in Jefferson City.

Williams and her mentee have been getting to know each other for about three months, meeting together about three times a month, including a visit to the Country Club Plaza.

"My heart goes out to her," Williams said. "I've gotten so much support in my life, I feel like it's time for me to give back. Being a mentor is a small thing compared to the need."

Ross describes himself as a person of faith who believes that everything is for a purpose. People ask how he can believe that after his childhood experience.

"I get that a lot," Ross said. "Yes, my brothers did die. But because of their story, I got to the foster home that I went to that was able to give me nurturing, to show me how a family worked. That nurturing allowed me to go into the Ross family. It led me to being able to trust someone enough to get married and to me getting this job and being able to work in this field and wanting to go out and make a change for the world."

Ross hopes that LP, the girl saved from the closet, gets all the love and nurturing she deserves. He also hopes her case will inspire people to help other children who are in need but not in the headlines.

"We need to use this story to not only help her but to make change for everyone else," he said.

Kansas City's Digital Divide

Key Findings

1. Non-users tend to fall into several opportunity groups:
    - **Those with interest, but don't think it's relevant**: (19% "don't need it" vs. 4% nationally). Educating these non-users about the value in the Internet's resources related to their needs will help increase relevancy.
    - **Those with interest, but are currently unequipped to take advantage of it**: either because they do not have a computer (15% vs. 12% nationally) or they think it is too expensive (13% vs. 10% nationally). Providing financial support (e.g., computer donations) will be critical to successful outreach with this group.
    - **Those who are uninterested in learning more about the Internet due to age:** (6% vs. national average of 4%) while overall "not interested" non-users trail the national average (22% to 31%). Helping non-users become aware of what they don't have will be very important to bridging the digital divide in Kansas City.
2. Both users and non-users perceive those without Internet access to be at a disadvantage for a range of activities. This perception is stronger in Kansas City than the national average. Job hunting is a significant area where users and non-users alike tend to feel that a lack of Internet access is a serious disadvantage.
    - Adults in Brush Creek North perceive non-users have a major disadvantage in job hunting and career skill development. In addition, the area has over 15% unemployment. This is an area where addressing Internet access can have a signficant economic focus.
    - In East Meyer, non-users are perceived to have a major disadvantage when it comes to getting health information. The non-user population (56% of whom are over 65 years old) would likely find value in outreach that addressed how the Internet can improve access to health information.

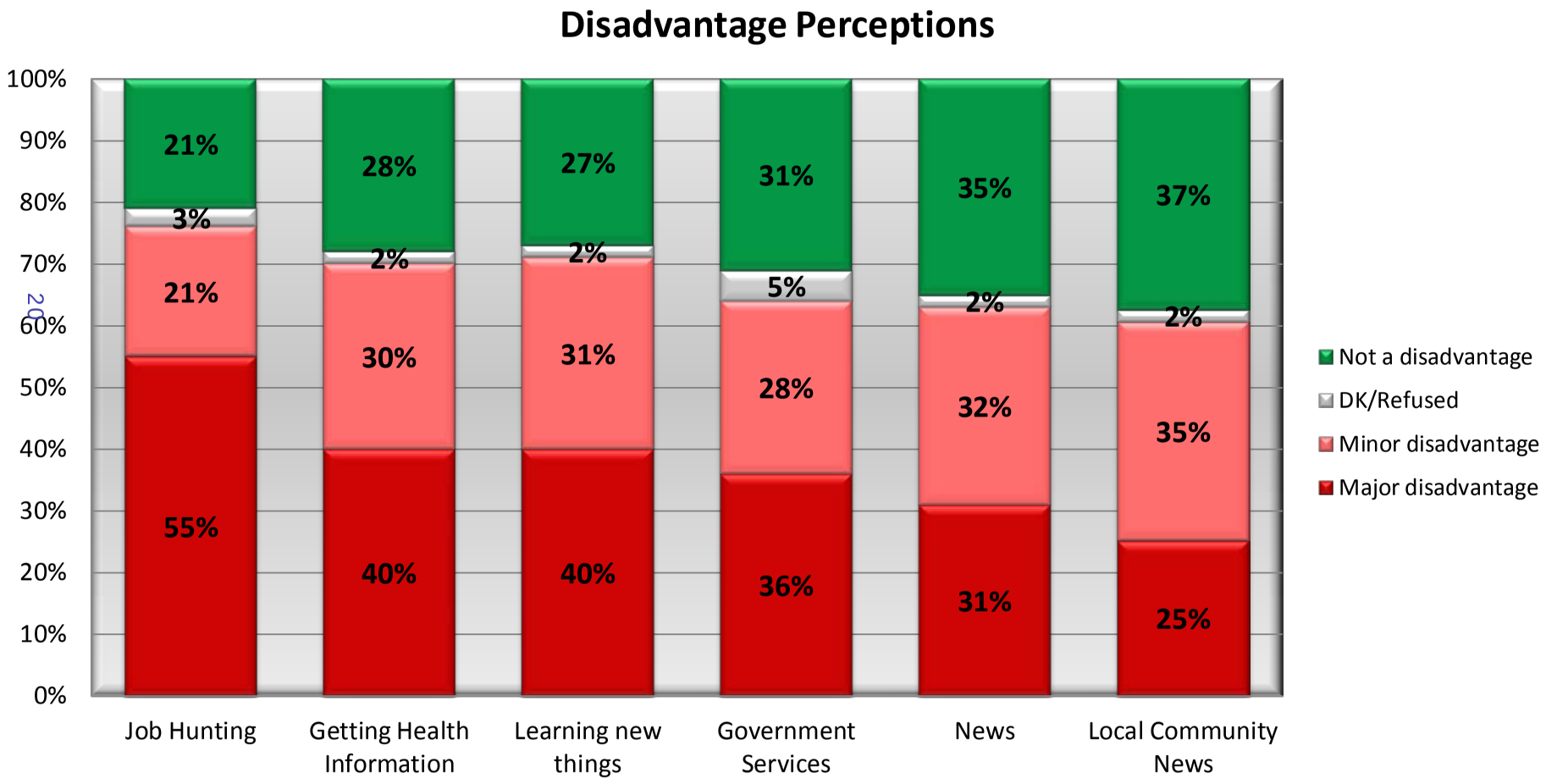
Pew Data Explanation

Throughout this analysis, Kansas City data will be compared to various Pew surveys in order to lend additional context to the data. Pew data referenced in this study has been sourced from one of the following projects:

1. Pew Internet & American Life Project/The Gates Foundation Reading Habits Survey, November, 2011
2. Pew Internet & American Life Project, April, 2010

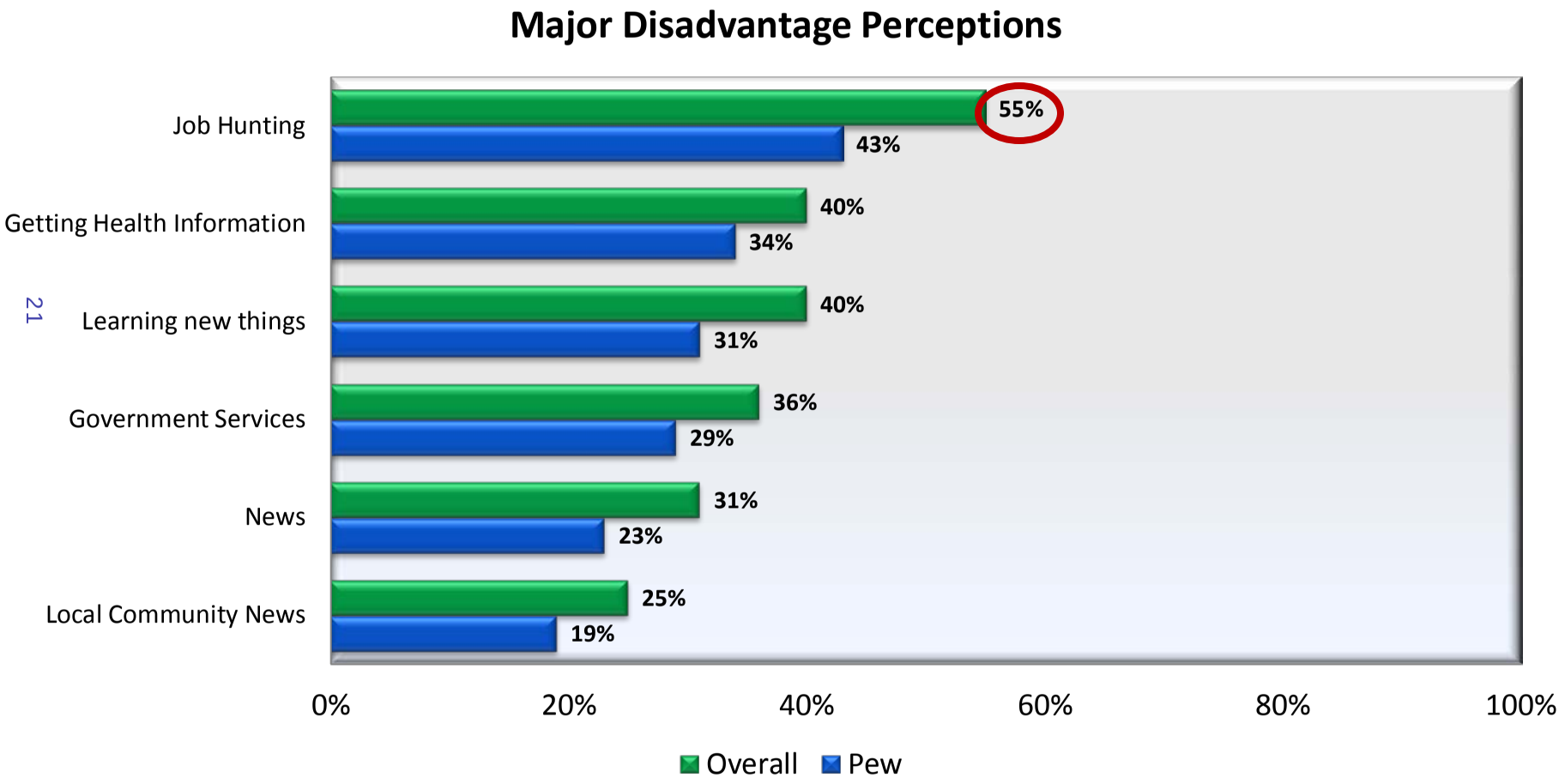
Kansas City Disadvantage Perceptions

Most adults in Kansas City believe that people who do not use the Internet are at a disadvantage when it comes to obtaining information about a number of topics



Disadvantage Perceptions Compared Nationwide

Kansas City residents, more than adults nationwide, cite a strong non-Internet user disadvantage, especially when it comes to job hunting.



Overall Non-User Profile for Kansas City

Non-users in Kansas City tend to be older, African American, less educated, and make less than $25K.

Age	KC Overall	Non-Users
18-24	10%	2%
25-34	20%	7%
35-44	20%	10%
45-54	18%	15%
55-64	15%	19%
65-74	8%	17%
75+	7%	27%

Education	KC Overall	Non-Users
High School or less	31%	64%
Some College	25%	20%
College or more	41%	11%

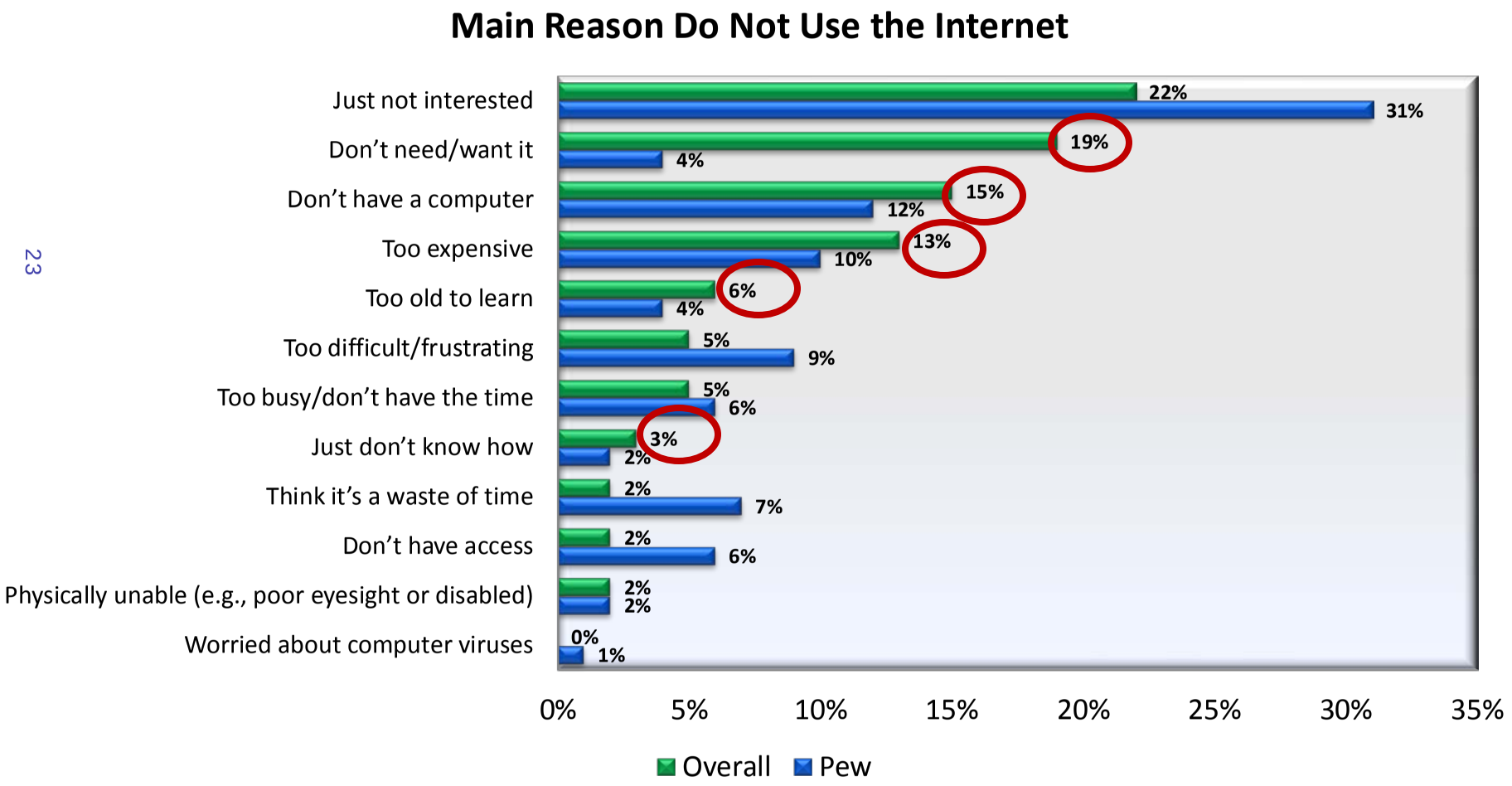
Ethnicity	KC Overall	Non-Users
White	59%	35%
Hispanic	9%	8%
African American	26%	46%

Gender	KC Overall	Non-Users
Men	48%	47%
Women	52%	53%

Income	KC Overall	Non-Users
Less than $25K	19%	42%
$25-$50K	23%	21%
$50-$75K	17%	9%
$75-$100K	14%	3%
$100K+	15%	4%

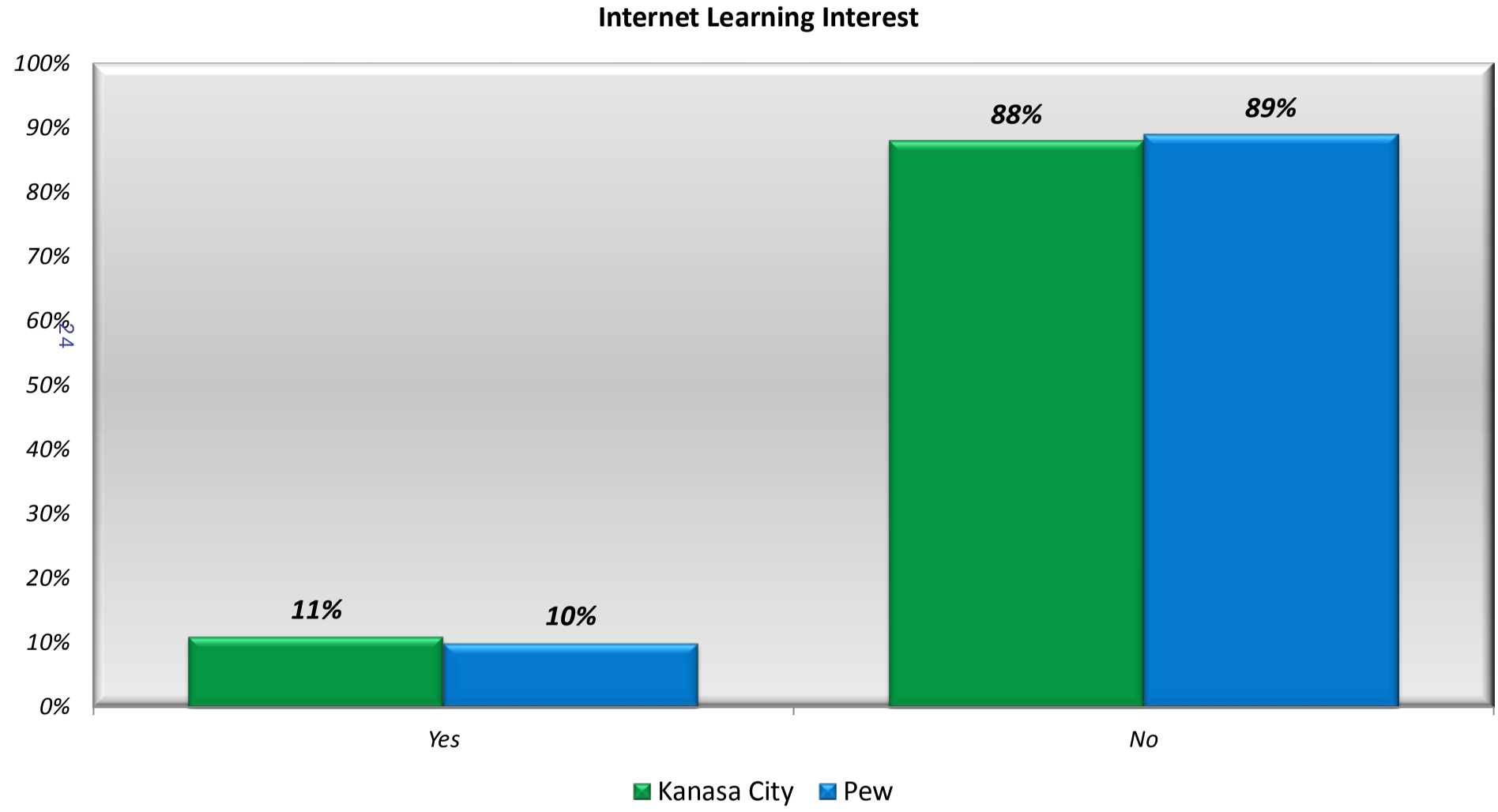
Reasons for Not Using the Internet

Non-interest in using the Internet is nine points lower than among adults nationwide. Don't need/want, don't have a computer, too expensive, too old, and just don't know how responses are all higher than the national average.



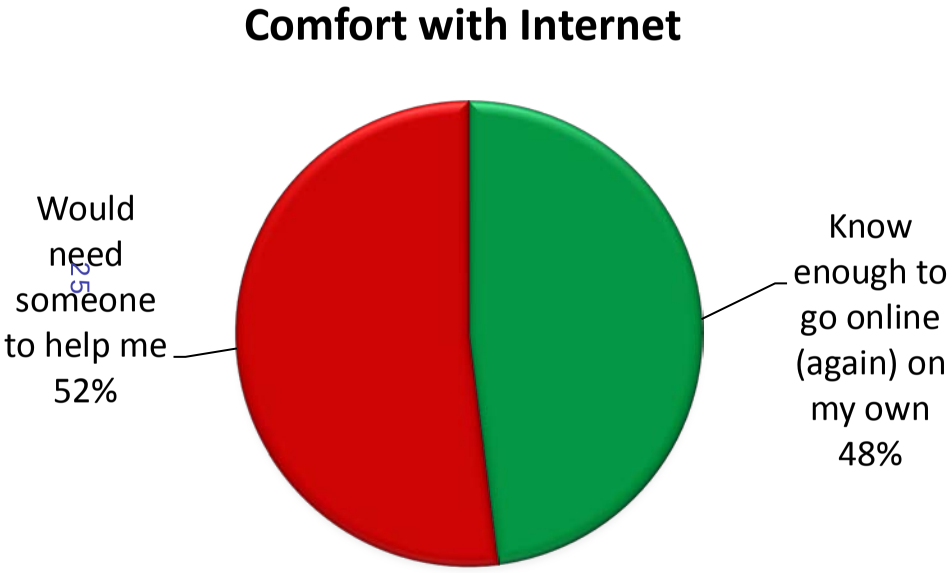
Interest in Learning

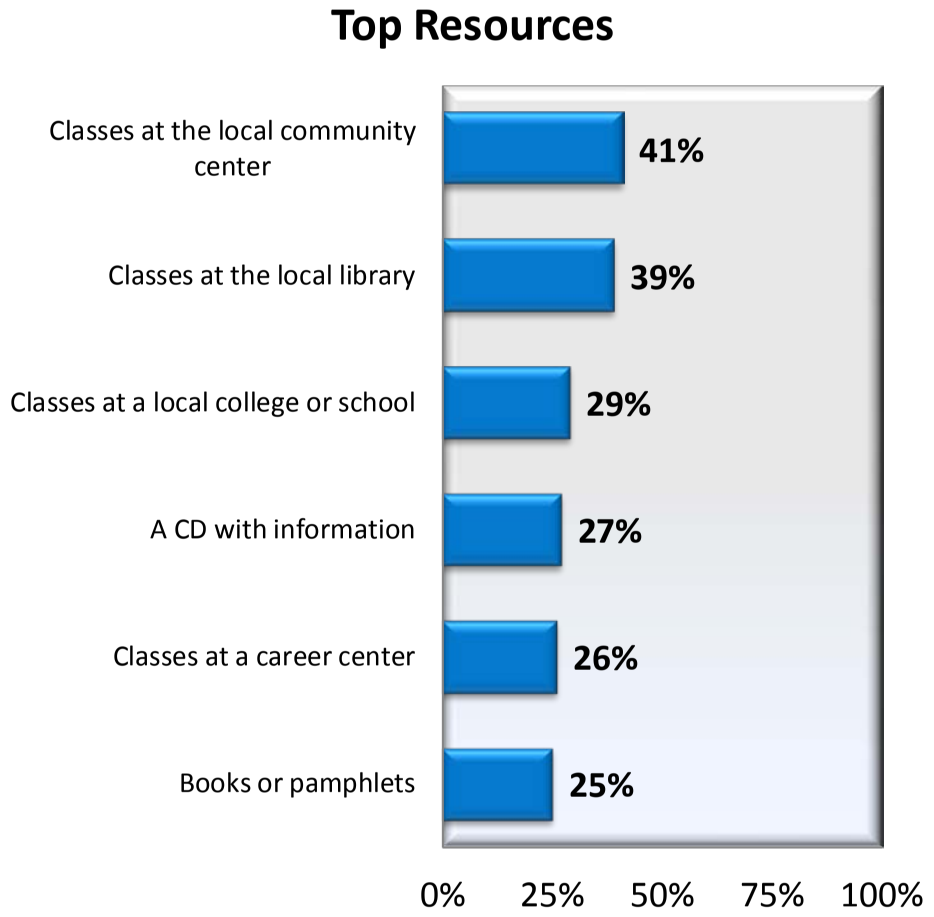
Among non-users, interest in learning how to use the Internet tracks closely with the national average.



Non-Users Needing Help

A little more than half of Kansas City adults who are interested in using the Internet again indicate they would need someone to help them. Classes at the local community center or library would be the best way to help these individuals.

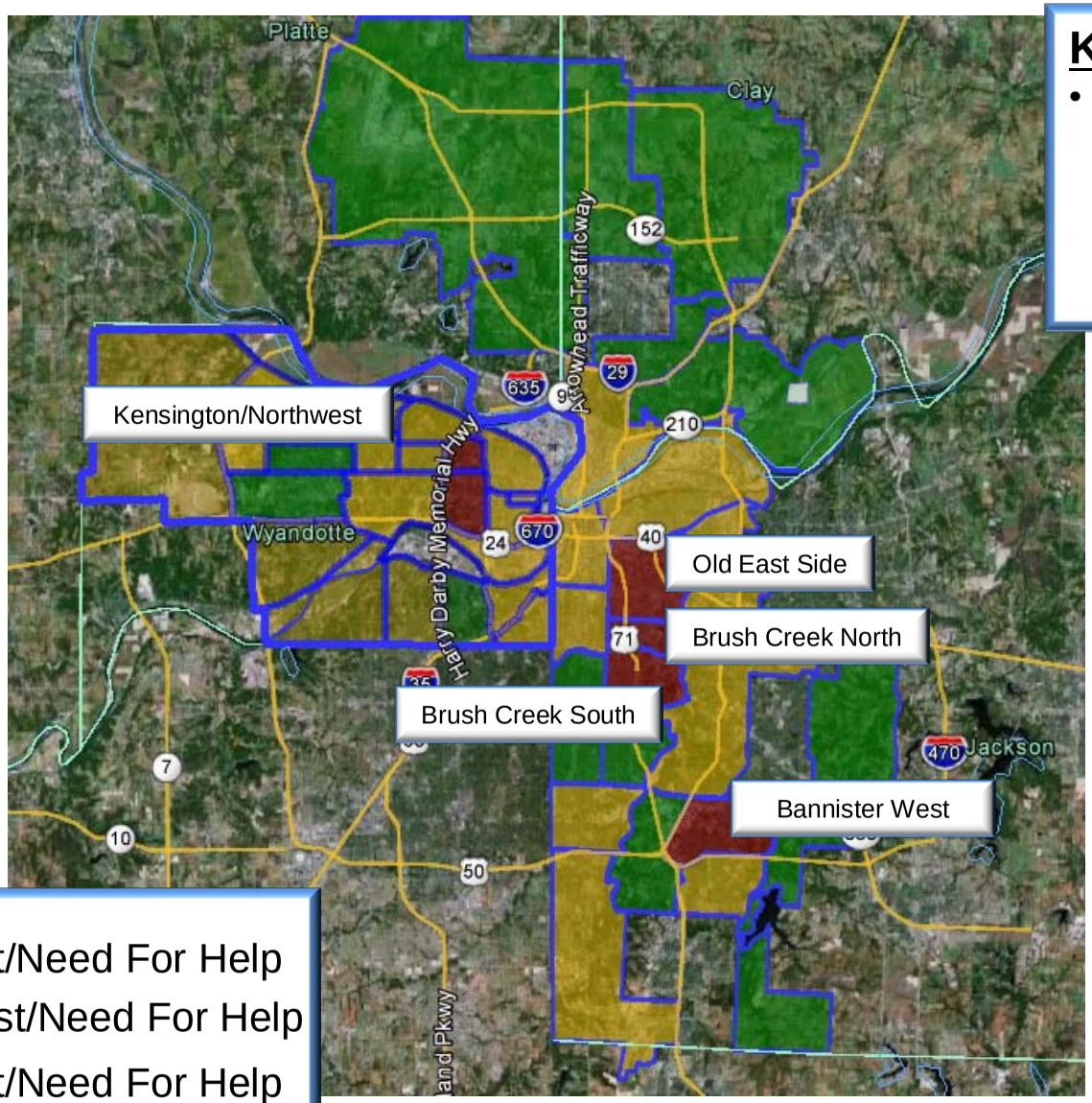




Outreach Focus: Heat Maps Overview

1. **Interested/Need Help**
   - Significant numbers of non-users indicated interest for learning the Internet and felt that they needed help to learn
   - Well-suited for general digital literacy outreach
2. **Unemployment/Non-User Job Search Disadvantage**
   - Previous research identified neighborhoods where unemployment was over 15% and overlaid this with neighborhoods where 65% or more perceived non-users to be at a major disadvantage in job hunting
   - Well-suited for digital literacy outreach focused on career skills and job hunting
3. **Lack of Computer/Technology Expense**
   - Significant numbers of non-users said not having a computer or the expense is the primary reason for not using the Internet
   - Well-suited for computer donations /digital literacy training to help people begin getting online
4. **Seniors/Heath Information Disadvantage**
   - High concentrations of non-using seniors where a lack of the Internet is perceived as a major disadvantage for getting access to health information
   - Well-suited for digital literacy outreach focused on getting better information about health-related topics
5. **School Children in Non-User Homes**
   - High concentrations of school aged children (4-18 years old) living in homes that do not use the Internet
   - Well-suited for school outreach program

Outreach Focus: Interested/Need Help

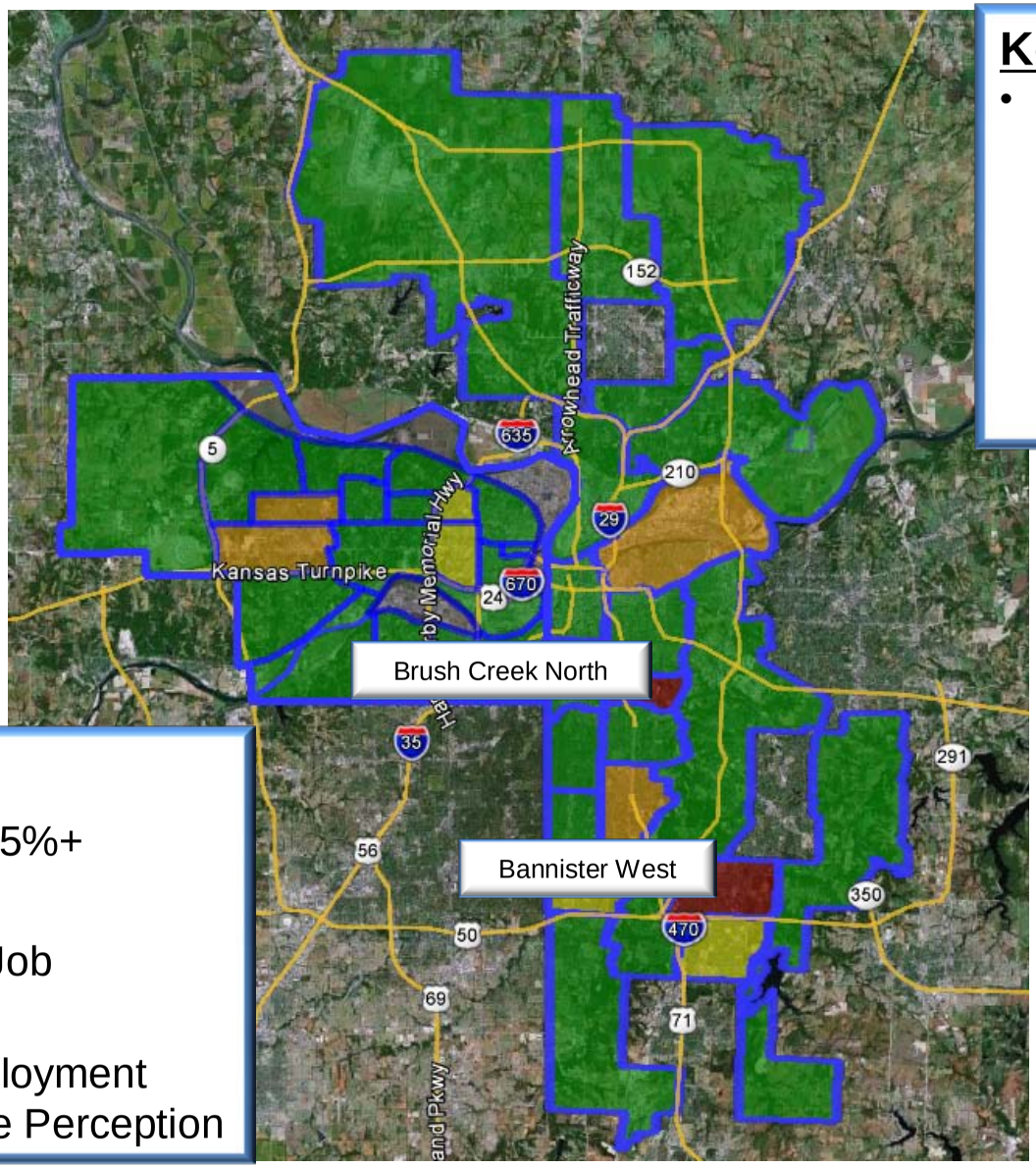


Key Insights

- The less affluent neighborhoods rank highest on the Interested/Need Help Index.

- Less Interest/Need For Help
- Some Interest/Need For Help
- High Interest/Need For Help

Outreach Focus: Unemployment/Non-User Job Search Disadvantage

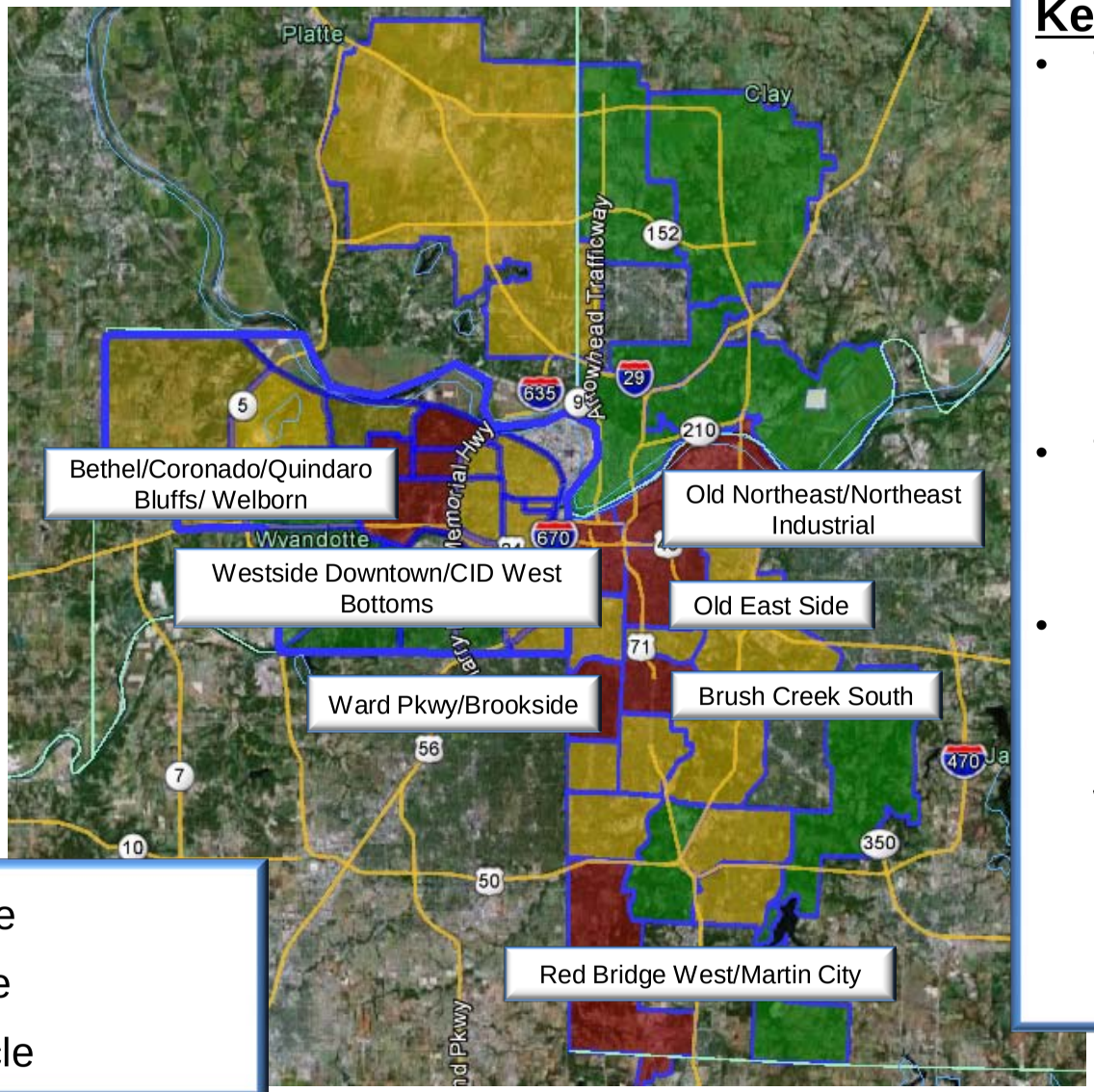


Key Insights

- Brush Creek North and Bannister West are both areas where unemployment is high and non-users are perceived to be at a major disadvantage in looking for work.

- Smaller Problem
- Unemployment: 15%+
- Perceived Major Disadvantage In Job Searching: 65%+
- Both High Unemployment And Disadvantage Perception

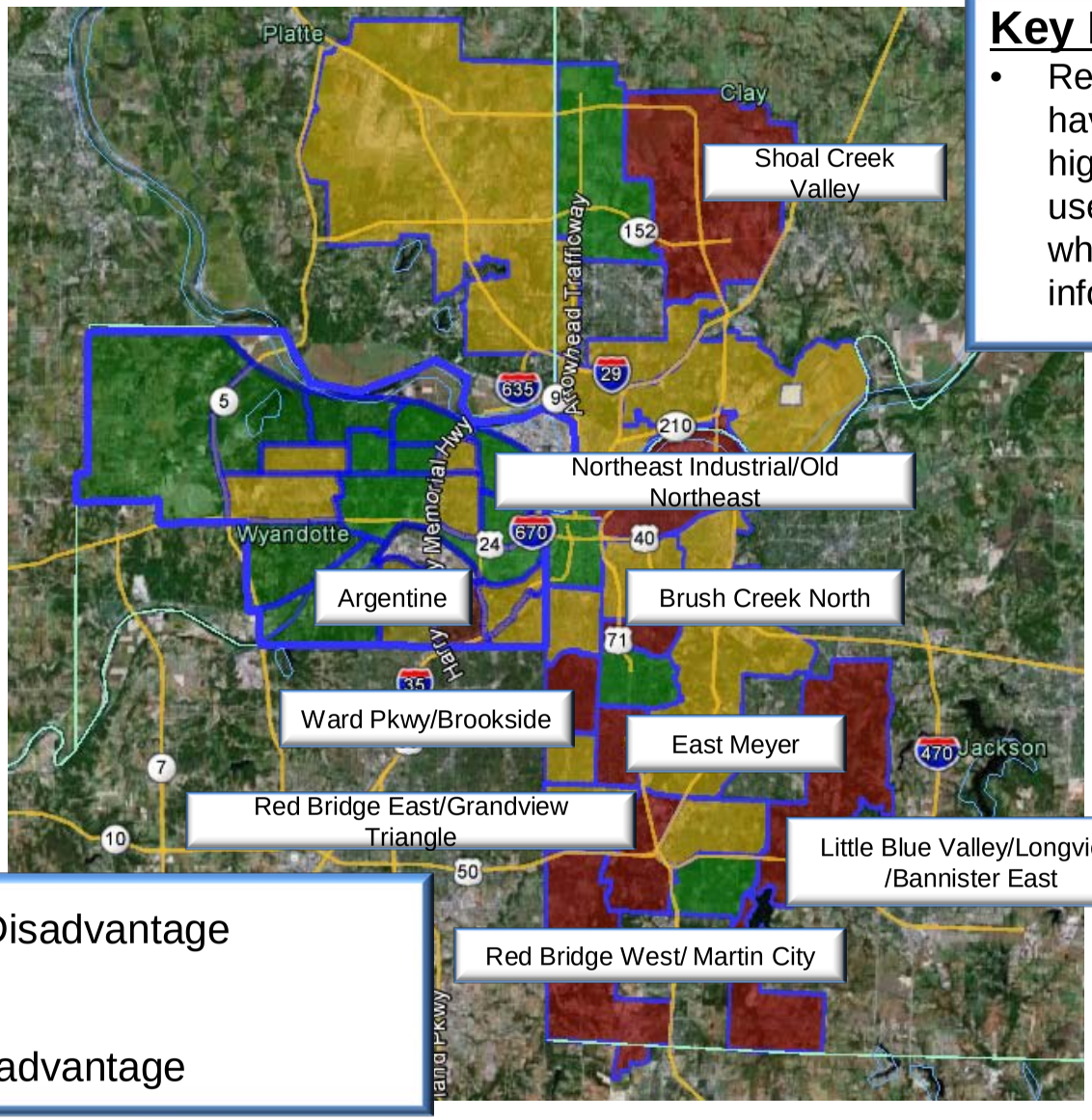
Outreach Focus: Lack of Computer/Technology Expense



Key Insights

- These neighborhoods have the highest percentage of non-users who say that a lack of computers/expense is a major reason they are not online.
- These neighborhoods are not necessarily all low income areas.
- For example, Ward Parkway/Brookside, reported a much older non-user population with lacking a computer as the reason for no Internet exposure.

Outreach Focus: Seniors/Heath Information Disadvantage

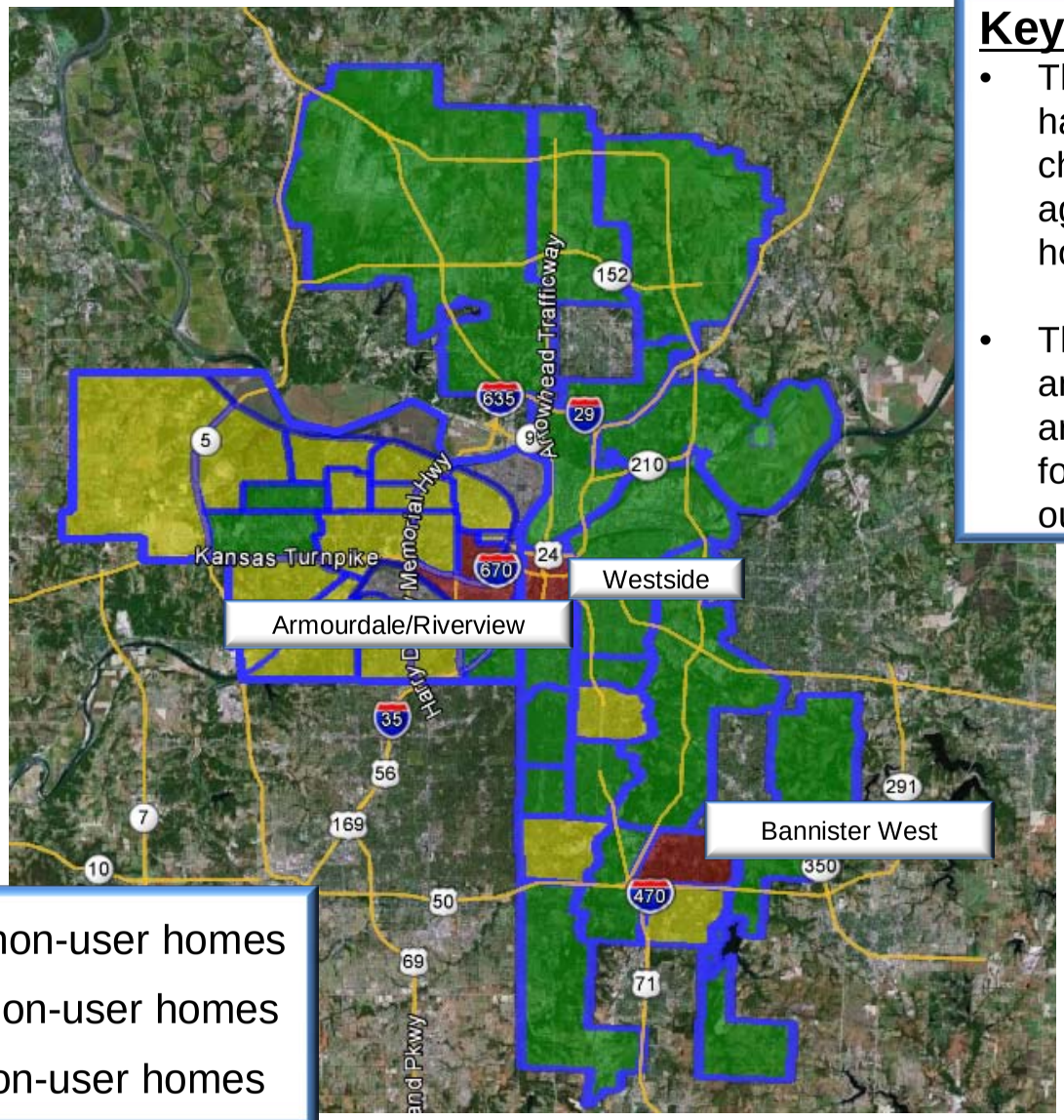


Key Insights

- Red neighborhoods have both seniors and a high perception of non-user disadvantages when it comes to health information.

- Younger/Less Disadvantage
- Mid Range
- Older/More Disadvantage

Outreach Focus: School Children in Non-User Homes



Key Insights

- Three neighborhoods had large numbers of children (grade school aged) in non-user homes.
- These neighborhoods and yellow grade areas would be ideal for school-based outreach.

- Fewer children in non-user homes
- Some children in non-user homes
- More children in non-user homes

Outreach Focus: Heat Map Summary (1 of 2)

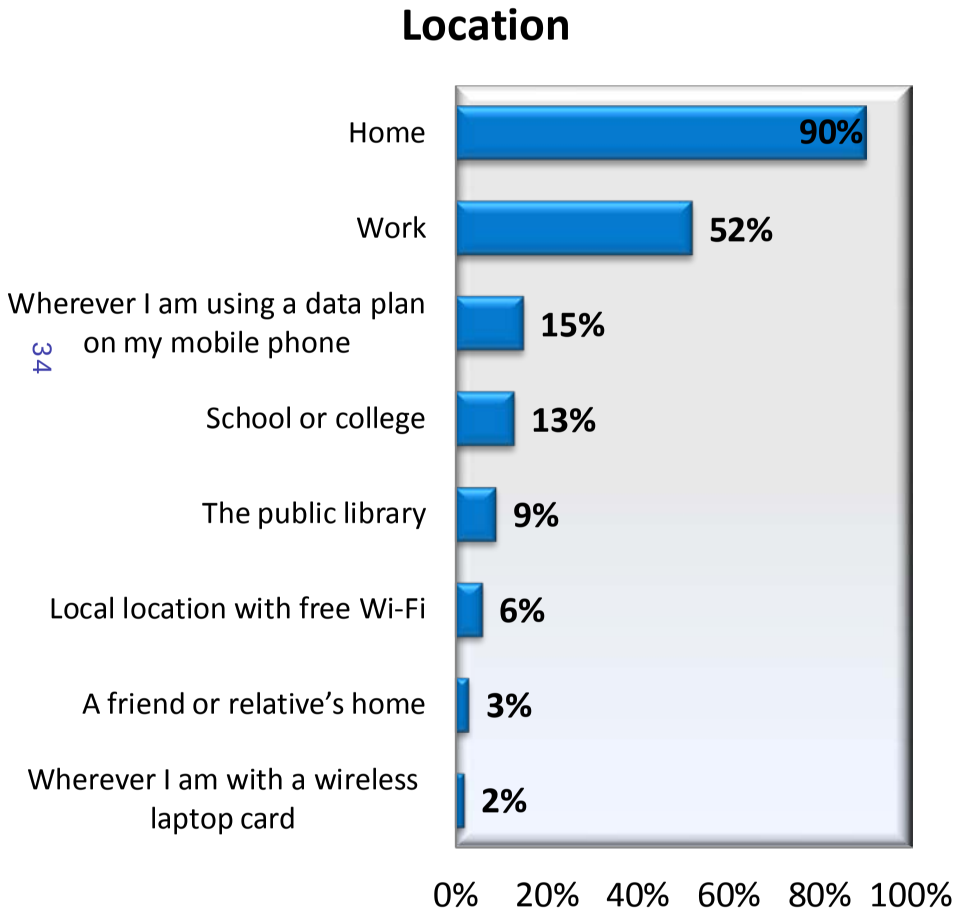
Neighborhood	Heat Map Category	Outreach Strategy
Argentine	Seniors/Health Information Disadvantage	Digital Literacy: Health
Armourdale/Riverview	School Children in Non-User Homes	School-based Outreach
Bethel/Coronado/Quindaro Bluffs/ Welborn	Computer/Technology Expense	Computer Donations/Digital Literacy
Brush Creek North	Interested/Need Help	Digital Literacy: General
	Unemployment/Non-User Job Search Disadvantage	Digital Literacy: Jobs
	Seniors/Health Information Disadvantage	Digital Literacy: Health
Brush Creek South	Interested/Need Help	Digital Literacy: General
	Computer/Technology Expense	Computer Donations/Digital Literacy
Bannister West	Interested/Need Help	Digital Literacy: General
	Unemployment/Non-User Job Search Disadvantage	Digital Literacy: Jobs
	School Children in Non-User Homes	School-based Outreach
East Meyer	Seniors/Health Information Disadvantage	Digital Literacy: Health

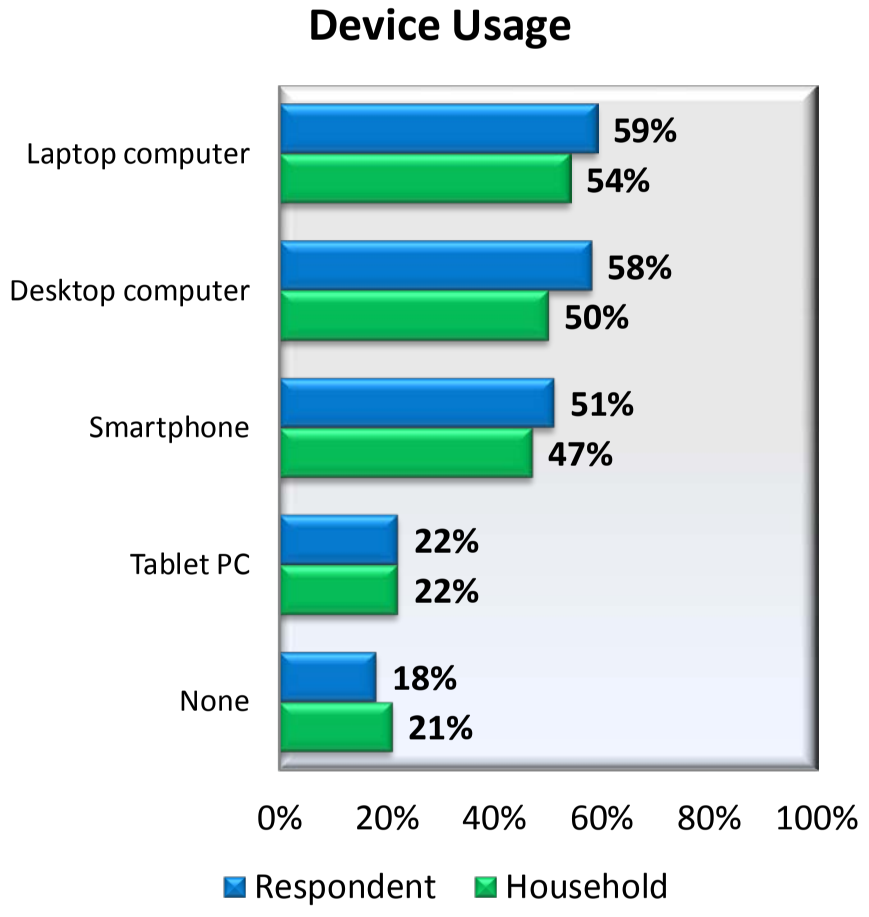
Outreach Focus: Heat Map Summary (2 of 2)

Neighborhood	Heat Map Category	Outreach Targeting:
Little Blue Valley/Longview/ Bannister East	Seniors/Health Information Disadvantage	Digital Literacy: Health
Old East Side	Interested/Need Help	Digital Literacy: General
	Computer/Technology Expense	Computer Donations/Digital Literacy
Old Northeast/Northeast Industrial	Seniors/Health Information Disadvantage	Digital Literacy: Health
	Computer/Technology Expense	Computer Donations/Digital Literacy
Red Bridge East/Grandview Triangle	Seniors/Health Information Disadvantage	Digital Literacy: Health
Red Bridge West/Martin City	Computer/Technology Expense	Computer Donations/Digital Literacy
	Seniors/Health Information Disadvantage	Digital Literacy: Health
Shoal Creek Valley	Seniors/Health Information Disadvantage	Digital Literacy: Health
Waldo	Seniors/Health Information Disadvantage	Digital Literacy: Health
Ward Parkway/Brookside	Computer/Technology Expense	Computer Donations/Digital Literacy
	Seniors/Health Information Disadvantage	Digital Literacy: Health
Westside/Downtown/CID/West Bottoms	School Children in Non-User Homes	School-based Outreach
	Computer/Technology Expense	Computer Donations/Digital Literacy

Overall Kansas City Internet Access

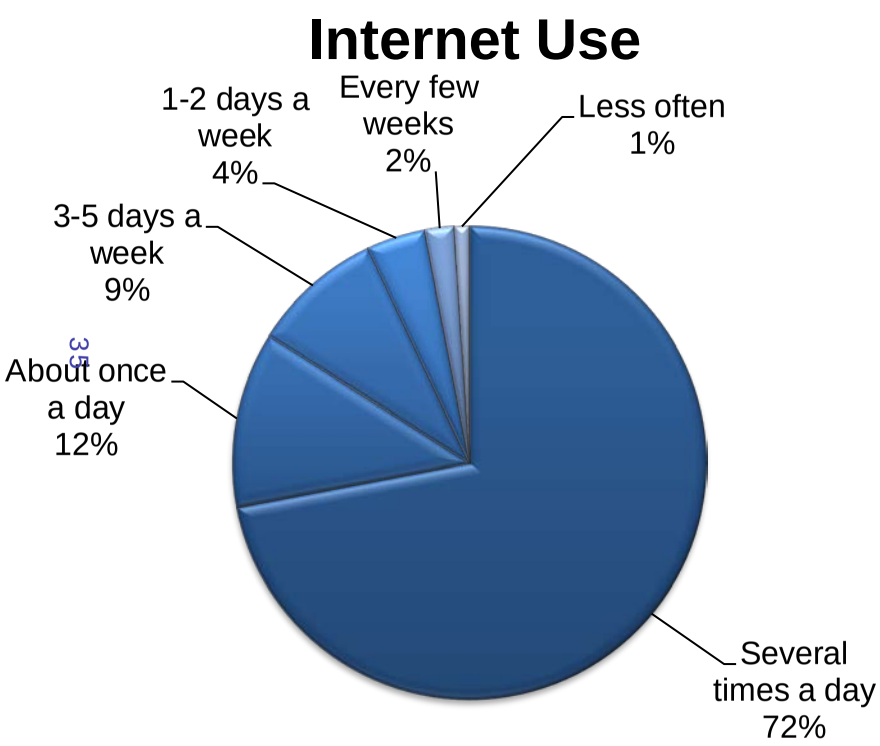
Adults in Kansas City typically access the Internet from home while just over half access from work. More than half indicate that they use laptops, desktops, and smartphones to access the Internet.

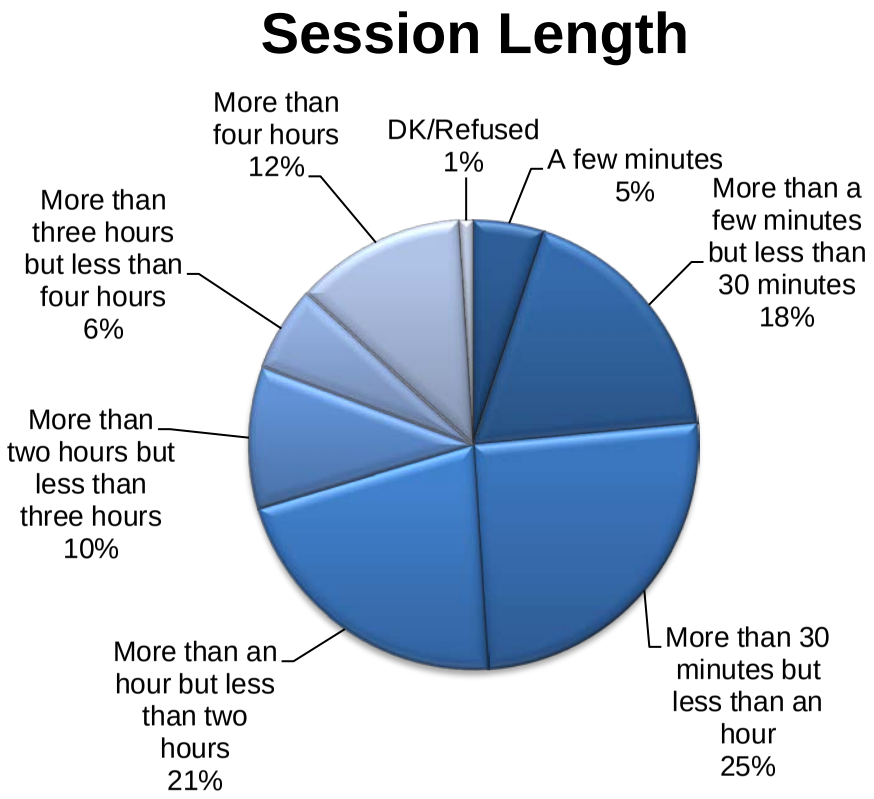




Internet Access Frequency

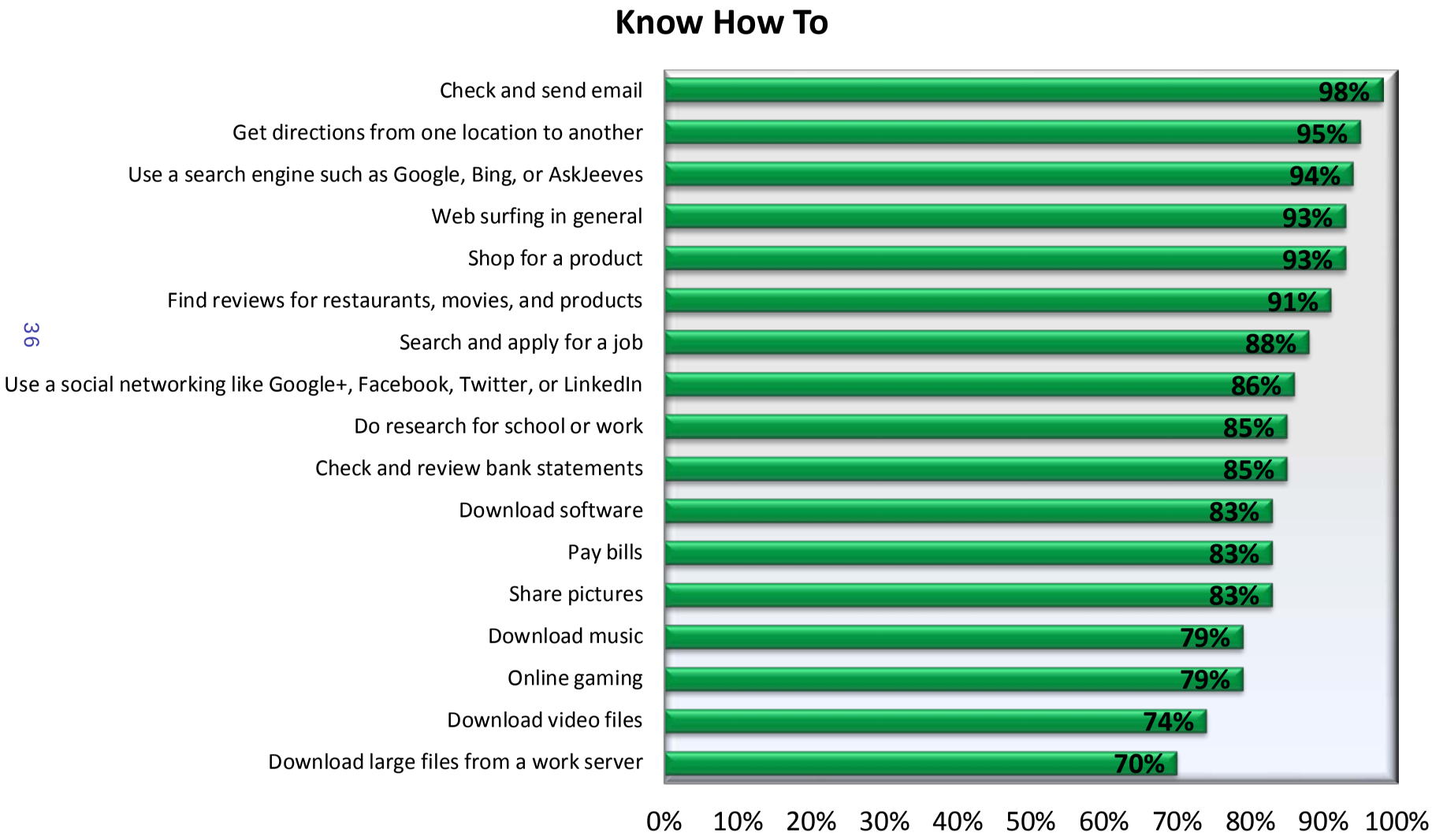
Nearly three-quarters of Internet users access the Internet several times a day and more than half are online for more than an hour a day.





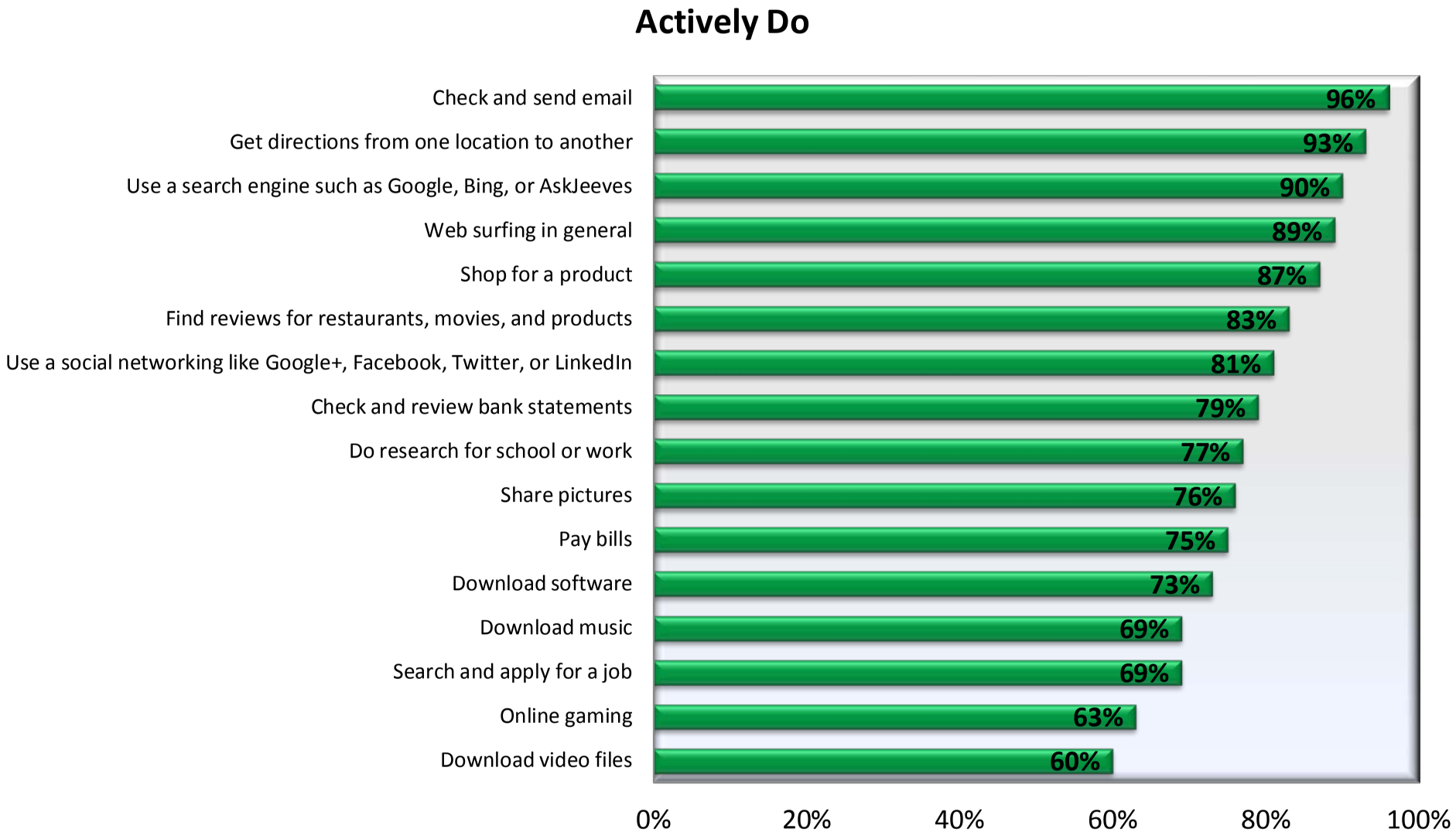
User Knowledge

Overall Internet literacy falls off slightly as tasks become more complicated.



User Activity

Kansas City residents are less likely to participate in more complicated tasks.



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