

A Collective Approach to Providing Digital Skills Training Among U.S. Public Housing Residents

Soyoung Lee¹, Julie Hui¹, Zachary Rowe², Tawanna R. Dillahunt¹

¹ University of Michigan, Ann Arbor ² Friends of Parkside, Detroit



FRIENDS OF
PARKSIDE

Motivation

Learning basic digital skills is essential to accessing healthcare, employment, and education among under-resourced communities in the U.S. But half of the adults in the U.S. lack confidence and preparedness to use digital tools in learning (Horrigan, 2016)

Intervention

Using **community-based participatory research approach to increase digital skills capacity**, we conducted an intervention to train community members to provide digital skills support to other community members.

Study Design

- Partnership with a non-profit organization serving a predominantly African American public housing community in Detroit
- 4-week pilot basic computer skills training (online learning modules, weekly virtual class huddle, team meetings) led by the director of the non-profit
- Data collection: observation / survey / interview
- Participants: a cohort of 9 community members

Preliminary Findings

Best Practice

- 1 Foster social learning**
 - Peer support (emotional/learning)
 - Open discussion on individual learning among trainees (online/off)
 - Check-ins through non-digital communication channels (e.g., phone)
- 2 Online resources with live help**
 - Immediate help from synchronous live sessions than video lectures that afford time flexibility
- 3 Hands-on practice**
 - Team assignment: final team presentation using Google Slides
 - Practice in daily lives: at home with family members / at work

Challenge

- 1 Anxiety in learning new digital skills**
 - Regardless of their existing skill or knowledge level
- 2 Personal life challenges**
 - Additional obstacles (e.g., unexpected move, family illness) to finding sufficient time for learning
 - Disproportionately occur more among under-resourced community members (Dillahunt et al., 2018)
- 3 Technical device / internet issues**
 - Ongoing support for hardware, network and access to devices are needed

Initial Training Outcomes



“We pick up where one leaves off... There were times when we wanted to give up because of what we didn’t know, but we encouraged each other not to... We learned you don’t have to be naturally gifted at computers when taking this training.”

- Increased self-efficacy in learning digital skills (3.04 -> 3.40/4)
- Apply new digital skills in workplace / personal life (e.g., Use emails instead of making calls at work, apply veteran benefits online)
- Continue to take additional online courses to review and further explore other topics after the training

Participants Demographics

Age	late-30’s to late-60’s (avg. 53)
Gender	7 (female), 1 (male), 1 (preferred not to say)
Race	8 (African American), 1 (African American, White)
Education	a high school diploma or some college

Discussion

- 1 Ways to minimize barriers to online learning for basic digital skills**
 - Curated online learning resources based on the needs of the community
 - More digitally adept members facilitated access and learning
- 2 Extends previous efforts to address the digital divide that provides only access to devices**

Future Work

- Identify additional non-technical skills and training requirements
- Assess whether the training meets the needs of community

Reference Digital Readiness Gaps (Horrigan, 2016), Entrepreneurship and the socio-technical chasm in a lean economy (Dillahunt et al., 2018)