



From Youth to Old Age

Thriving communities provide support and opportunities from youth to old age. Attracting young families is important to a vibrant economy and provides great opportunity to build social ties around youth activities. As residents age, finding support, housing, and opportunities to maintain social ties and activity are important to health, well-being, and longevity. Interviews and surveys indicate that Scott County has a wealth of strong social ties and some essential resources for residents across the life course, but it also faces some key challenges in supporting youth and the elderly.

Community Profile: Youth

Childhood fundamentally shapes adult outcomes. Ninety percent of brain development occurs in the first five years of life and significant neural pathways form during the rapid cell division of early life.⁴⁴ When children lack adequate sleep, nutrition, and age appropriate stimulation, brain development does not reach its full potential. Moreover, experiences of chronic stress in these early years affect a child's health and educational performance. Children's access to trusting relationships with adults is essential to developing healthy coping strategies that foster resilience in the face of life's challenges. Youth development from birth through the teen years is essential to producing strong, healthy, and successful adults.

In 2018, Scott County ranked number one in the state for low birthweight babies (11.3% compared to only 6.7% just 3 years earlier and a state rate of 8.1%) and 14.4% of babies were born prematurely compared to 10.7% in 2015.⁴⁵ Scott County ranked 76 out of 92 counties for prenatal care, with only 63% of mothers accessing prenatal care during the first trimester. In 2018, 21.8% of mothers reported smoking during pregnancy, down from 28.0% in 2015, but still more than twice the state rate of 11.5%. Seven children died from drug poisoning involving an opioid. Fifty-five students were homeless and five youth were committed to the Department of Corrections in 2018. Scott County ranked number one in the state for the rate of Children in Need of Services (CHINS) (71.3 per 1,000 children under the age of 18) and had a child abuse and neglect rate of 45.6 per 1,000 children under 18 compared to a statewide rate of 17.2.

Community Perceptions of Issues Related to Children and Youth

The people of Scott County appreciate that the future is in the hands of the community's young people. The schools are the center of community arts and athletic activities for youth. The community is home to 4-H, which includes a Robotics program that had a team qualify for the VEX Robotics World Championship in 2020. In

Figure 48: Priorities for supporting children and youth



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addition, youth participate in the Youth Grantmaking Council, the Kiwanis Club’s Builders Clubs and Key Clubs in both school districts as well as K-Kids in elementary schools, EMPOWER youth (part of CEASE of Scott County), Key Club, SADD, student council, and active church youth programs. The youth we spoke with cited the close-knit community and supportive people as the things they like most about living in Scott County. “There’s always someone to turn to” and “Everyone is nice and comes together during games.”

The survey was for adults, but the research team conducted two conversations with youth. These groups are not a representative sample of youth in the area, but represent a mix of kids who have lived in Scott County their whole lives and others who are new to the area. All are actively engaged in



school and community activities. They range in age from high school freshmen to seniors preparing to leave for college. We quote heavily from these conversations in an effort to give voice to local youth and place their comments in the context of adult perceptions of strengths, opportunities, and priorities.

We met with a group from each high school and in both cases they said the school was more like a family, “We all love each other. It’s safe. We know each other.” One student noted, “Everyone in the town knows each other—people are related, they literally have family at school.” Another student commented, “People in the community have relationships with local government. It’s easy to be connected to local leaders.”

When asked about the community’s assets, they list the YMCA, Mid-America Science Park, Hardy Lake, City Hall, and local forests. One youth referenced commuting patterns as a sign of quality of life in the community, “successful people from the county who go elsewhere for work still live in the county. They don’t leave Scott County for living—this speaks to how good the community is.”

Survey respondents prioritize drug and alcohol prevention and treatment for youth, prevention of child physical and sexual abuse, and the need to address bullying in schools (Figure 48). The youth we spoke with recognize the importance of these priorities, but would like to have the county be known for something other than the drug problem.

Figure 49: Supports for children and/or adolescents rated "good" or "excellent" by 50% or more of respondents



They want to address these problems by building strength and resilience, not by focusing too much on drugs and dysfunction.

Adult ratings of strengths in supports for children and youth fit what we heard from the youth with whom we spoke (Figure 49). Volunteer opportunities and schools are good. The youth we heard from are all very actively engaged in a wide range of sports, student clubs, and activities. One opportunity they spoke about as perhaps most life changing, is the Best Buddies program that pairs youth with peers who have disabilities. The youth discuss this as a transformational program that helps people become more comfortable with disability and reduces stigma and fear. They made new friends and valued their experiences. Volunteer opportunities are plentiful and the youth we spoke with are among those who step up and engage.

We asked youth what they would do in Scott County if they could do anything and money and politics were not obstacles. For youth in Austin, their ideas were simple:

A movie theater or something would be good. Something for youth to do. Keep people off the streets and doing good things instead of things they think are the only option.

A market. We don't have fresh produce, fresh groceries. We have to go to

Scottsburg Wal-Mart. We have gas stations and DQ, but that's it.

We need some entertainment.

Scottsburg youth echoed the need for “more places to go to do whatever.” One person mentioned enjoying going to shop in Clarksville and that the 30-minute kick boxing place is fun.

A pool. We lost our pool two years ago. It would be nice to have a pool instead of going to Madison.

Renovate the YMCA to be like the sports park they are building in Louisville—nice basketball gym and a track to run on.

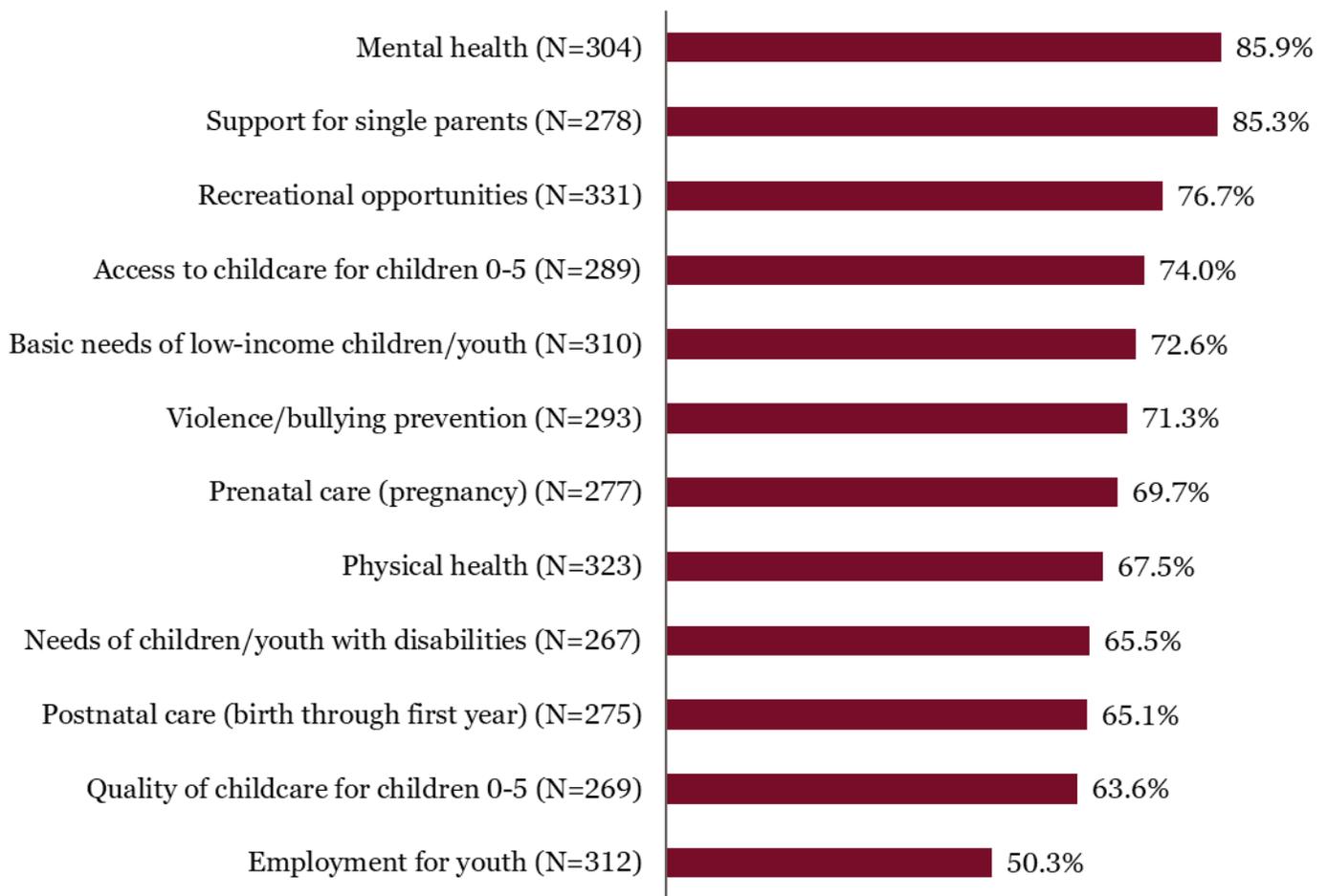
The arts—we need a healthy balance. Arts have a lot of benefits. A facility that people could use for musical productions and concerts—like a sports complex, but for the arts.

E-sports arena—maybe in the arts center. Lots of people would like to go watch.

Another youth chimed in about the appeal of “a place to learn—art lessons, dance lessons.”

The youth we spoke with are kids who are doing well, but public data and community perceptions reflect the reality that many youth in Scott County are not doing well. When we asked survey respondents (adults) to rate supports for children

Figure 50: Supports for children and/or adolescents rated "poor" or "very poor" by 50% or more of respondents



and youth, 50% or more rated most areas (12 out of 16) “poor” or “very poor” (Figure 50). That is a strong consensus that reflects the realities presented in the community profile data.

Mental Health topped the list of concerns followed closely by support for single parents (Figure 50). Both of these are basic needs. Recreational opportunities had the third highest percentage rating the resource “poor” or “very poor.” Access to childcare and basic needs of low-income children and youth and violence/bullying prevention were rated poor by more than 70% of respondents. The youth we heard from were also well aware of these basic needs.

Money is the biggest barrier. There’s money out there, just not here.

Not enough people. Entrepreneurs and business owners are reluctant because they

would not have enough business. If we could convince people there is a market, we could have more businesses.

It’s a poor community. Not a strong enough customer base for the things we want. The way it is now is also a barrier. Who wants to put a Ruth’s Chris next to ARBY’S and BK?

Several of the youth we heard from plan to return to Scott County after college. A couple of them want to teach in Scott County schools. Others say they want to live in Scott County, but assume they will need to work outside the county. One youth has no plan to live here—the small town just is not her thing.

As the Scottsburg group came to a close, one of the students shared a parting comment:

A few years ago, I was with a group of about

45 students and we were asked how many of us had traveled outside of Scott County and where to. There were about 15 kids in the group who had never left Scott County. I think this is common here and it limits peoples' ability to imagine anything different from what they know. People in Scott County don't like change. I think they are afraid of it because they know nothing else.



The parting comment from the Austin group:

Don't listen to the people who don't live here. We are nothing like what the news says about us. We're a big family: that's the best way to put it.

Adults and youth alike recognize the need to do more for children and youth. Community Profile data confirm community perceptions and put stark numbers to local concerns about child abuse. In order for Scott County to prosper, childhood must get better. As noted in the Health and Wellness section of the report, the average Adverse Childhood Experiences score among a sample of Scott County adults is 4.1.⁴⁶ The data on Scott County children suggests this figure will remain high in the current generation of children. Scott County will continue to struggle with health and education (the base requirements for economic development) as long as this pattern continues. This makes prevention and mitigation of childhood trauma an enormous leverage point for Scott County. Among the strategies for preventing and mitigating the effects of childhood trauma are the following⁴⁷:

Strengthen economic supports to families.

- Strengthen household financial security.
- Family-friendly work policies.

Promote social norms that protect against violence and adversity.

- Public education.

- Bystander prevention.
- Reduce corporal punishment.

Ensure a strong start for children.

- Early childhood home visitation.
- High-quality early care and education.
- Preschool enrichment with family engagement.

Teach skills

- Social-Emotional Learning.
- Safe dating and health relationship skills programs.
- Parenting skills and family relationship approaches.

Connect youth to caring adults and activities.

- Mentoring programs.
- After-school programs.

Intervene to lessen immediate and long-term harms

- Enhance primary care.
- Victim-centered services.
- Treatment to lessen the harms of ACEs.
- Treatment to prevent problem behavior and future involvement in violence.
- Family-centered treatment for substance use disorders.

In Scott County, the Coalition to Eliminate Abuse of Substances (CEASe) is hard at work with local service providers and public schools to adopt trauma informed approaches to working with youth and adults. Coalition members seek to break the cycle whereby children of trauma grow up to become parents who, without better skills and often suffering from financial stress, depression, anxiety, and/or substance abuse, perpetrate traumas on the next generation. Scott County now has several people certified to train others in trauma informed practices.

Youth offer good ideas as well. Not all prevention work will need to focus specifically on concerns about drugs and alcohol (and in fact, many youth would like to focus on other things). Kids need more options for activities and they need more opportunities to build trusting and safe relationships with adults. These opportunities need to be realistically available to the youth least likely to engage them. This will require aggressive efforts to remove invisible barriers including cost, transportation, and any needed supplies or gear. These efforts need to find ways to move beyond the usual joiners to reach the youth who may be in greatest need. Mentoring, creating social norms, and nurturing social and emotional development can come through a wide range of activities. An

important base for all such work is high quality early care and education.

Community Perceptions: Older Adults

As the baby boomers enter old age, the senior population is growing all across the country. Rural communities that have seen young people leave often find themselves with a disproportionate share of older people. Scott County is not too far off of the national age distribution. Still, the boomers are creating increased demand for housing and services for the elderly.

In the survey sample, the top two needs are housing-related: affordable assisted living options and affordable housing (Figure 51). The consensus drops off after those top two and just over a third selected caregiver support and access to daily meals as priorities. Day programs rounded out the top five, but only 22.3% selected it. In part, this is because the list of priority options was long. Tests for differences based on income indicate affordable housing is the only area where the two income groups differ significantly. Lower income respondents were more likely to identify affordable housing as a priority.

Figure 51: Priorities for older adults, percent of full sample that selected items as top priorities (N=309)

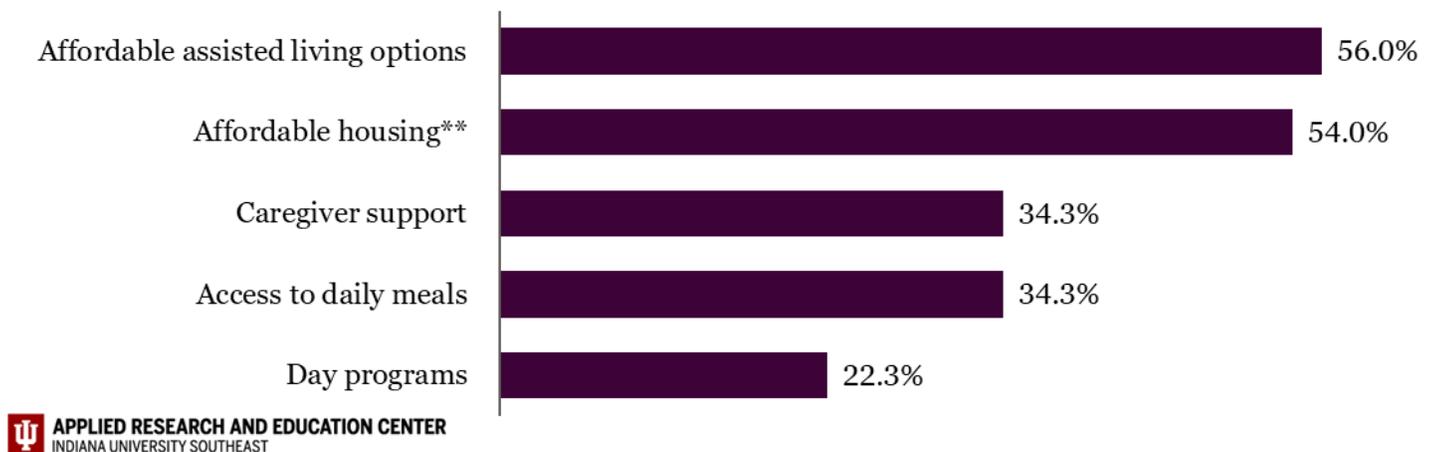
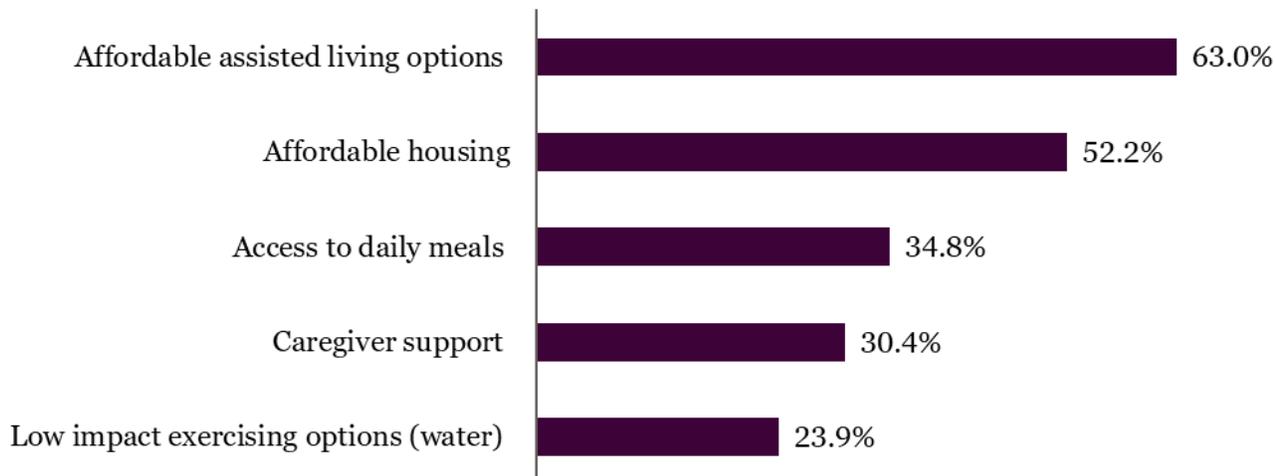


Figure 52: Top five priorities among seniors (N=46)

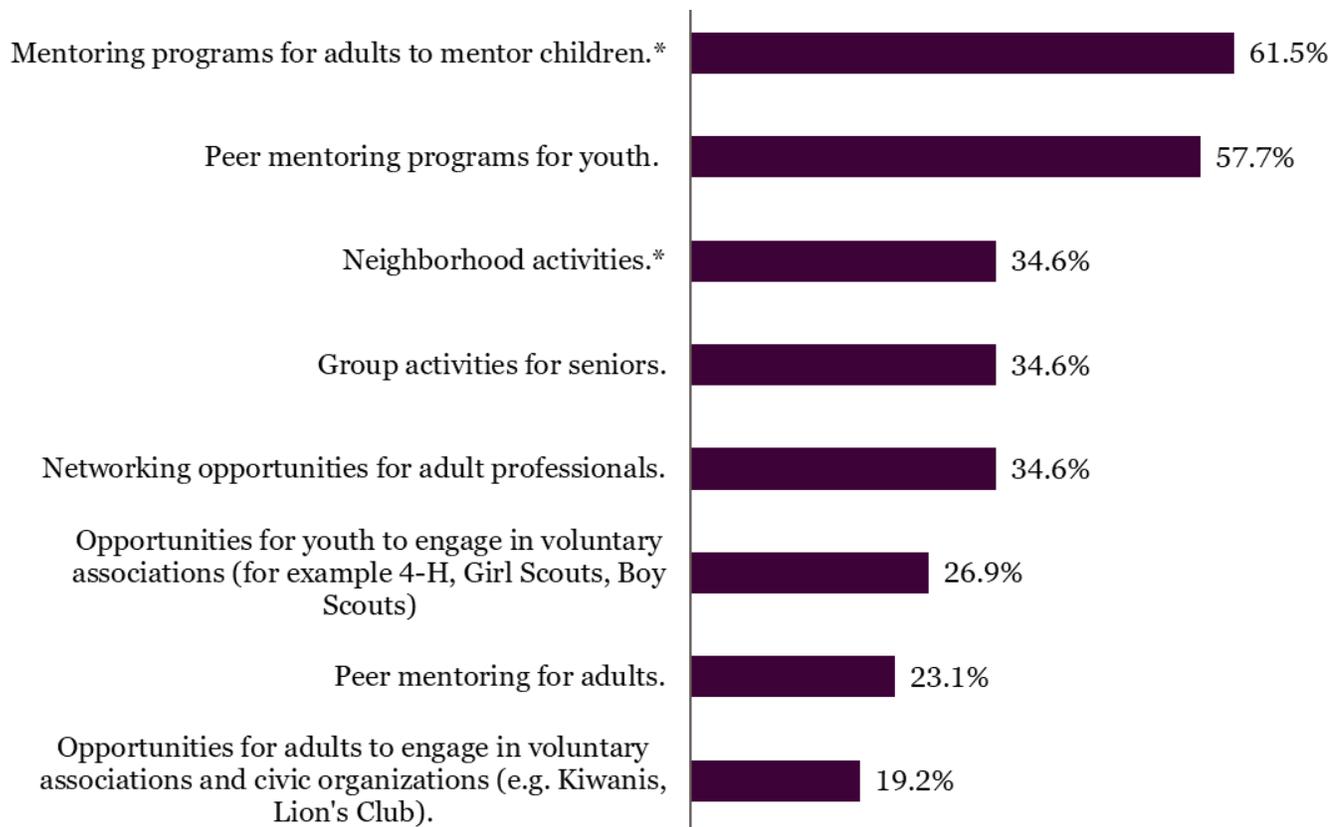


When we pull out just those survey respondents over age 65, the top four items are mostly the same with even stronger consensus around affordable assisted living, but the number five item is low-impact exercise options (water), rather than day programs (Figure 52). This issue came up in open-ended responses as well. The closure of the YMCA

pool has eliminated a community resource important to senior health and wellness. Aquatic exercise is low impact, easy on the joints, and adjustable to the speed and ability of the group.

In the list of overall quality of life/place items, 56.9% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “This is a good place to

Figure 53: Priorities for Community Building, respondents 65 and over





retire” (N=355). Among seniors, however, 80.0% agreed or strongly agreed that Scott County was a good place to retire and 20.0% disagreed. None of the elderly respondents who responded to the question strongly disagreed (N=50). One might speculate that among the elderly, those who thought it was not a good place to retire already left the area. Alternatively, there may be a cohort effect where those who are elderly now believe that Scott County is a good place to retire, but younger respondents are looking for something different. They may or may not come to see it as a good place to retire as they age.

When asked about priorities for community building, the senior respondents prioritized youth. Only 34.6% selected “Group activities for seniors” (Figure 53).

The group agrees however, that affordable housing and assisted living are issues for seniors in Scott County. Based on interview conversations, younger people are a bit unclear about what all is available, but those who are older or who have helped their parents look for a place to live are keenly aware of limitations. In a survey event discussion, one woman indicated that she feels she will need to leave the area in the next few years because she will need more readily accessible

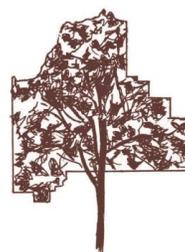
healthcare and a setting that requires less driving.

Forward Together

Like others, Scott County seniors prioritize a local focus on youth. Nevertheless, they also identify the need for more support for basic needs among the elderly. Ideas for improving quality of life and place for youth and the elderly will have important indirect benefits for the whole community.

- Establish more opportunities for youth to engage in recreation, healthy activities, and entertainment during non-school hours.
- Build on school-based theater and performing arts programs to establish a community arts center where high school kids can work with adults and younger kids to provide more arts performances, gallery shows, classes, and creative spaces in the community.
- Increase supply of housing to support seniors aging in place (include attention to walkability) and consider ways to encourage intergenerational interaction and opportunities for seniors to mentor, or at least befriend, young people.
- Expand affordable options for assisted living to accommodate the baby boomer cohort.
- Ensure that seniors have access to daily meals.
- Expand availability of respite support for those caring for seniors.

All citations and figure numbers consistent with full report. Full citations available at www.scottcountyfoundation.org.



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