



ANNUAL REPORT 2019



Peace



Northern Ireland - Ireland

European Regional Development Fund



It has been an exceptionally successful year for the Open Doors project. Whilst the political instability has continued to ensue around both National and European negotiations, the role of the Open Doors project has been to provide stability and support to those from the Ex-Prisoner/ Former-Combatant community.

The project has grown from strength to strength and I am extremely proud that the Outreach Clinics has provided help and support to some 6700 people.

There is much to highlight throughout the year, though I would like to highlight the success of the planning event which helped shape the project delivery and the seminar series and to focus on the issues facing the ageing community, are especially worth noting.

During the first year of the project, I have been encouraged to see how we have all made such a positive impact to the lives of those from the Ex-Prisoner and Former Combatant (EPFC) community, especially in accessing day-to-day help and support. The role of our collaborative partners, the area coordinators and the local outreach officers have been fundamental to the overall success of the project.

I would also like to say a special word of thanks to our funders, SEUPB, and our 4 strategic delivery partners, in making the first year a huge success.

Peter Sheridan

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What is Open Doors?

'Open Doors' is a regional initiative which aims to build relationships between the Ex-Prisoner and Former Combatant (EPFC) community, and other groups across a range of sectors.

The project was developed over a period of 2 years and is led by Co-operation Ireland. The other partners on the project are:

- Charter NI
- Teach Na Failte
- Ex- Prisoners Interpretative Centre (EPIC)
- The Plough Historical and Cultural Group

The project is funded by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) and has been granted €1,666,045.31 to deliver a number of project targets and objectives.

Over the past year, the 'Open Doors' project has been successfully bringing people together on a pathway towards a normalised society, which accepts the past and recognises the important contribution that Ex-Prisoners and Former Combatants can make to a peaceful society.



“My past is my past.... I just want people to see me as a person, a father and a husband”

What is Open Doors?

The Open Doors project focuses its work across 5 main thematic areas which were agreed by the 4 delivery partners.

Conflict Transformation: Building confidence in the EPFC community in both the political and legal structures to critically examine the past and explore the potential to address legacy issues.

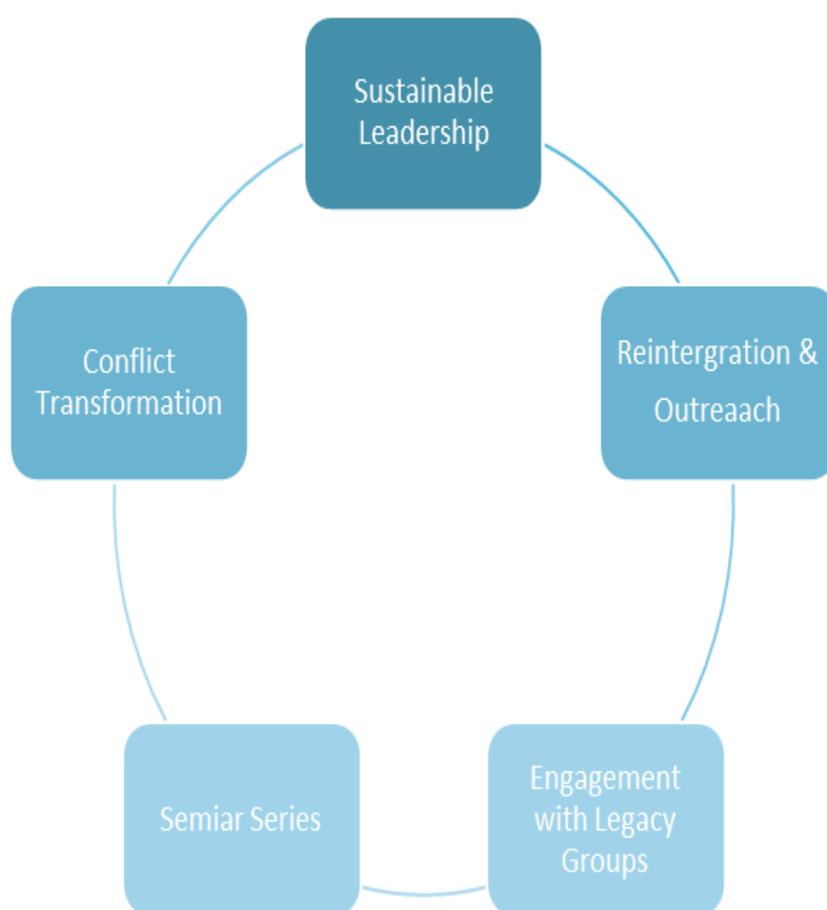
Sustainable Leadership: The project skills up a new generation of leaders in the EPFC community to engage in high level dialogue and sustain the project's outcomes in the long-term.

Reintegration & Outreach:

The project establishes a regional network of Outreach Clinics to build trust with individuals and provide primary support and advice on health and welfare issues for those in need. The project works to create the necessary relationships with mainstream service providers so they understand the needs of the EPFC community.

Seminar Series: The project was set up to deliver 6 sectoral seminars to build dialogue and support the relationship building process.

Engagement With Legacy: The demarcation between the EPFC community and other legacy groups contributes to the continuing marginalisation between the EPFC community. The partners on the Open Doors project believe that the experience of these groups can contribute to a wider understanding of the past and help rebuild relationships between communities.

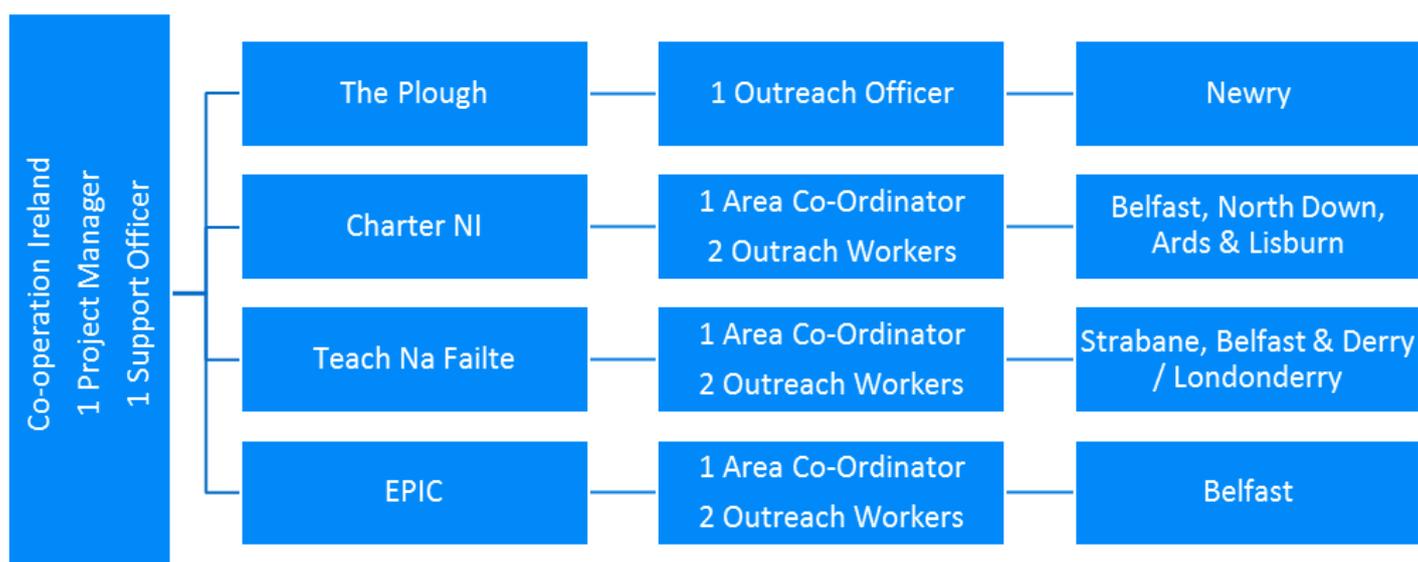


Progress 2018/ 19

Throughout 2018/19 Co-operation Ireland and the 4 strategic partners have been strongly focused on delivering 3 of the main Open Doors project themes.

- Reintegration & Outreach
- Engagement with Legacy
- Seminar Series

Open Doors has developed a project management structure that requires Co-operation Ireland, as the Lead Partner, to monitor and review the operation of the project regularly.



Reintegration & Outreach

One of the big positives has seen the establishment of a number of Outreach Clinics across the 4 areas. The clinics act as advice centres on a range of issues including education, benefits, health care and many other areas in which Ex-Prisoners and Former Combatants and their families need help and support to navigate.

Throughout the year, the 358 Outreach Clinic sessions have helped over 6700 people with a full range of issues and supporting them to achieve their goals and make huge steps forward within their local communities.

Engagement with Legacy

Engaging with our past and leaving a legacy is often thwart with many difficulties as much of our divided history has left a deep scare on those who are part of the Ex-Prisoner and Former Combatant communities, as well as their families.

Throughout 2018/19 the Open Doors project has helped and supported 6700 participants take the first positive step in healing the divisions, whilst seeking the appropriate help and support for those who were victims and survivors of the conflict. Whilst this is a very difficult journey, many have began the small positive steps in moving forward around issues concerning legacy.

This has been positively supported through our legacy programme, which has specifically focused on and educating participants across multiple themes and in partnership with other support organisations including;

- Healing Through Remembering
- Victim & Survivor Commission
- Victim & Survivor Services
- Wave Trauma Centre

Seminar Series

Throughout the first year of the project, we began to focus on how best to support the relationship building process, whilst exploring issues facing the EPFC community. The first seminar series event focused on the issue of aging and explored how the age profile of the EPFC community presented some challenges. Participants were able to consider issues such as physical and mental health, diet and fitness and how to plan for retirement. The seminar was also guided by the Older Persons Commissioner, Mr Eddie Lynch, who helped facilitate and educate a number of participants around areas of concern.



Launch: Open Doors Project

The Open Doors project held a very successful launch which took place in Farset, Belfast, in December 2018.

Over 120 people attended the launch and the event received great publicity from the media and a number of attendees were interviewed by Downtown radio.

A number of key speakers addressed those in attendance and underlined the strategic importance of the Open Doors project in;

- Dealing with the more difficult aspects of reconciliation.
- Addressing many of the often overlooked and complex needs of the EPFC community.
- Helping to acknowledge the past and promote healing between individuals on opposite sides during the conflict.
- Supporting the willingness of EPFC community to take a proactive role in helping to overcome past divisions, through legacy & resolution.

Planning Event 2019:

Co-operation Ireland successfully brought together project partners and staff to focus on the issues facing local people and how the Open Doors project could help, support and alleviate a number of those issues and concerns, now and moving forward into the future.

The event consisted of a number of key seminar topics and evaluation sessions in order to scope out how best the project could be delivered and importantly how it could be shaped to meet the needs of the EPFC community.

As part of the evaluation process all stakeholders present found consensus around 5 key areas which would be vital to ensure the smooth and successful delivery of the Open Doors project, namely;

- Administration
- Communication
- Reporting
- Freedom to speak openly and honestly
- Collective strategic planning of events and seminar learning activities

Feedback from the event was very positive and all participants highlighted the importance of everyone feeling valued and having their point listened to. Everyone expressed the importance of such an event in ensuring that the programme and its content delivered on the programme outcomes and importantly was shaped to ensure it delivered for the EPFC community and their families.



Event Feedback

- 80% of all participants were extremely confident about moving forward with the Open Doors project, with a further 10% feeling quite confident about engaging with the project.
- 60% of all participants were extremely clear on how the Open Doors project could be delivered, with a further 30% being quite clear around delivery.
- 90% of all participants felt that the level of communication and participation had been excellent, with a further 10% feeling it was good.
- Key quote from the event;

“Let us ensure we move forward with positivity and a clear strategy for achieving our goals”

Life As A Member Of The Ex-Prisoner & Former Combatant Community

I am a former republican, socialist, prisoner who spent 12 years in Long Kesh and was released in 1986. I found there was no after care upon my release as such, by this I mean actual proper support for me, nothing had been put in place to support the person returning home, this was very much left up to the individual and their family.

Therefore, I had no choice but to struggle on to try and find employment, which wasn't exactly easy and still isn't. I had to cope with my own issues the best way I could, which if I am honest I didn't always do. My family suffered a great deal, they had to put up with my mood swings. I was not a nice person to be around, and the atmosphere in the home was always bad, like something was going to kick off.

I was off course very unaware of how everyone else was feeling and would explode at the drop of a hat and without being able to explain why? Around 2001 I was introduced to Teach Na Failte [TnF], it took a while for me to get my head round what they were trying to achieve, but when I realised they were putting in place something which would try to address exactly what I was feeling and the issues myself and others were going through. I soon understood the very real need for such an organisation.

The work throughout the Open Doors project has really helped and has introduced not only ourselves, but also our families to a wide range of different courses and activities. It has helped to raise levels of confidence and self-esteem but more importantly I feel it helped and supported to bring about real and genuine cross community contact and build of relationships and mutual understanding with others. I was greatly relieved when the Open Doors project begun, especially the in-house welfare rights service, which was very badly needed as welfare cuts were introduced across the board. My family and I look forward to knowing that help and support is nearby should we need it.

Open Doors Project Creating a Positive Impact

Charter NI Positive Impact

The first year of the Open Doors project has been warmly welcomed by those from the EPFC community. Our staff host a weekly Prison Crafts project with 11 EPFC people participating and enjoying getting to meet and chat with others.

We meet regularly to create crafts that were made in Long Kesh/Maze while we were imprisoned there during the conflict. This is a valuable project, which gives the local community a valuable resource by having a dedicated project worker. The Open Doors project provides an opportunity to talk to Loyalist EPFC's in an informal setting, allowing them the opportunity to find out if anyone has any problems and issues that may be effecting them and their families.

This informal setting really works for our staff, as it gives them a great chance to support and signpost those who need and want supported in an informal manner.

The Open Doors project has greatly helped some of our older community members to deal with isolation and mental health issues, creating a greater sense of camaraderie within the group.

The Open Doors project has also provided a great way to "deal with the past" as it gives those from the EPFC community an opportunity to discuss their past experiences in a safe and supported environment .



The Plough Positive Impact

The Plough group encountered no barriers during the first year delivering the Open Doors Project. All of the community and statutory bodies which were approached engaged positively within the programme.

We have had positive responses from local community groups, especially in Nationalist areas and have enjoyed the opportunities for engagement with our Loyalist EPFC colleagues in the Open Doors project.

In the Newry area, the Plough Open Doors project has been able to establish links with other EPFC representatives and groups from a predominately Provisional Republican background and build positively upon local relationships. The Plough EPFC constituents have commented very positively on the support they have received from the project and how they can now engage in a safe environment with other local support agencies.



EPIC Positive Impact

The Open Doors project has been a great experience so far. It has been especially rewarding in helping old comrades reconnect with each other and see them have a sense of belonging within their communities.

Building positive relations between the EPFC and the wider community has meant the sharing of experiences and expertise with partner groups. This has helped assist the EPFC community and support them engage with wider society, including key stakeholders and statutory groups.



Being able to offer a friendly, dependable face for those suffering from social isolation, has been a big positive within the project. The first year has gone in quickly and everyone is looking forward to supporting the Open Doors project moving forward.

Positive Impact on Issues Facing EPFC Community

A major component of the Open Doors project has been to discuss and address a number of the collective issues facing the EPFC community, whilst promoting the need for change in local and national decision making and policy. Throughout the year the project and participants have looked to address a number of issues;

Lack of Employment Opportunities

The Open Doors project has met and presented to the Ex-Prisoners Review Panel in-order to discuss the difficulties facing the EPFC community in accessing jobs across the province. Dialogue with the various statutory partners is ongoing as we look to ensure that representatives from the EPFC community are not prejudiced when it comes to securing employment opportunities.

Aging

The Open Doors project recognises that the age profile of the EPFC community is that of an aging demographic. In order to support the EPFC community, the Open Doors project has focused on developing an informative seminar series which focuses on issues such as physical health, mental health, healthy eating and personal safety.

The project has also made representations to the Commissioner for Older People in Northern Ireland drawing awareness to the issues facing an aging EPFC community.



Rights Based

The Open Doors project has been very supportive in helping members of the EPFC community in addressing issues such as welfare rights, employment and health, to name a few. Right across the 8 centres all of our Outreach Workers have supported some 6700 people with a wide variety of rights based issues.

Seminar Series– Addressing The Challenges Ahead

In March 2019, the Open Doors project held a Seminar at the Dunsilly Hotel, Antrim, to consider the rising issues facing the EPFC community. A number of key speakers were in attendance, including Mr Eddie Lynch, the Commissioner for Older People in Northern Ireland. Commissioner Lynch shared his experiences with the group and gave an insight into the role of the Commissioner and how it was created to advocate, support and represent the aging population throughout the province.

He also highlighted a number of general issues which were important for the EPFC community to consider;

- Financial Scams
- Loneliness & Isolation
- Lack of Accessible Transport
- Local Health & Social Care Provisions
- Pensions & Income & Retirement Plans
- Adult Safeguarding & Personal Safety

Representatives from the 4 delivery partners also presented to the attendees on their experiences in;

- Health
- Education & Employability
- Benefits & Welfare
- Isolation & Addiction



Mr Eddie Lynch, Older Peoples Commissioner discusses the issues facing the ageing population

All of the local speakers helped to address a specific area of need and gave participants a positive viewpoint in how to overcome a number of the pressing issues. All of the local speakers encouraged participants from the EPFC community to challenge themselves and strive to support a positive vision within their communities.

Throughout the Seminar a number of workshops were hosted to highlight pressing and difficult issues facing the EPFC community. These included;

- Lack of full citizenship for Ex-Prisoners
- Lack of core funding needed for Ex-Combatants including the lack of suitable programmes
- Welfare reform needs to be discussed on cross-communities basis
- Need to urgently prevent legacy issues from moving down to next generations
- Outlaw legal discrimination against older people
- Better long-term strategy implementation for EPFC community
- Act against perceptions and stigmatisation of ex-prisoners and their families
- Mental health issues as a growing problem need addressed for EPFC community
- Not allowed to travel—on international terrorist watch list
- Inability to adopt children
- More liaison and engagement with COPNI
- More education seminars in the future
- Need for greater level of employment and education in working class areas



2018/19 Key Milestones

Deliver 27 Conflict Transformation Programmes Over 3 Years

Plan & Design 2 Educational Seminars Per Year

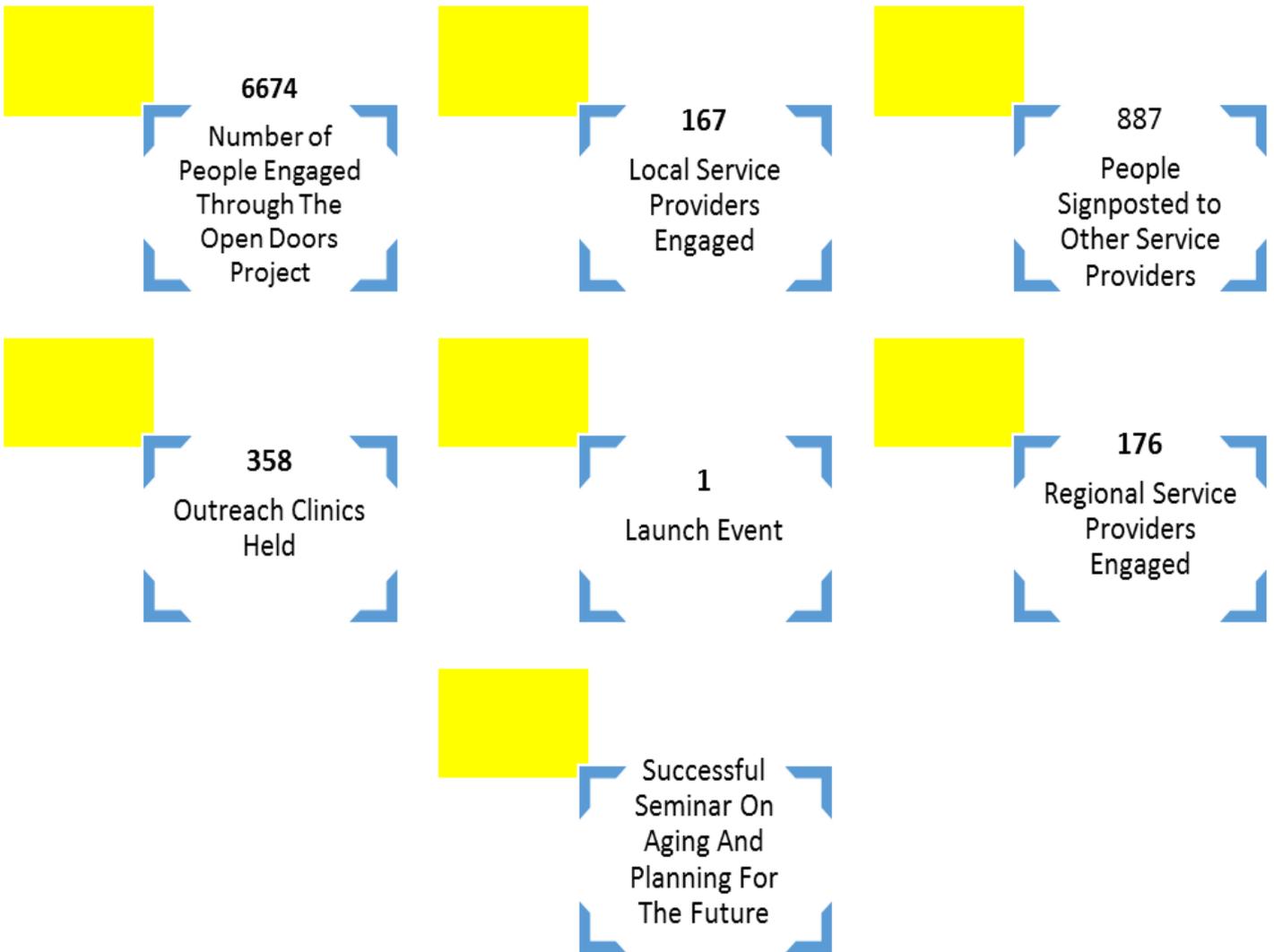
Promote The Existence of the Open Doors Programme To EPFC Community

Sign Post 500 People From The EPFC Community Year 1

Source Beneficial Training And Educational Sessions

Engage 1300 People From The EPFC Community Year 1

2018/19 Achievements



**Open Doors Financial Expenditure
Year 1**

April 2018– March 2019

	Income
Staff Costs	£310,632.11
Office & Administration	£46,589.39
Travel & Accommodation	£10,943.90
External Expertise & Services	£12,188.64
Equipment	£6795.71
Total Spend	£387,158.75



Moving Forward

Moving into 2019/20, the Open Doors project will continue to focus on a number of key areas which continues to deliver on the project plan, but also supports and builds upon the progress made with the EPFC community.

Outreach: The 4 partners will continue to expand the success of the Outreach Clinics including availability, locality and the range of support available. Consideration will also be given to expanding the services to Co. Fermanagh and the Border Counties, whilst focussing on the lack of support for the EPFC community West of the Bann.

Engagement With Legacy: It is planned that the Open Doors project and its representatives will meet with the Commissioner for Victims and Survivors (CVSNI) and the Victims Forum early in the new year. It is also anticipated that the staff from the Open Doors project will meet with other victims groups with the view to providing facilitation for wider participants.

Sustainable Leadership Programme: October 2019, will see the start of the sustainable leadership programme in partnership with Liverpool University and Coiste. Twenty local participants will take part in the programme which will focus on topics including culture, entrepreneurship, tendering, project management and project funding.

Conflict Transformation: Participants will take part in a 26hr conflict transformation programme which will focus on areas such as personal development, cultural enrichment, anti-sectarianism, as well as site visits to learn and educate about each others cultures at local museums.

OPEN DOORS



EX - PRISONERS
PROJECT



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