

Increasing employability for care experienced young people

Executive Summary:

This report provides an update to the report tabled at CPB on 15th February 2021 in regards to our care experienced young people that are not in Education, Employment or Training. It aims to give an update of the current data along with an overview of the initiatives aimed to improve opportunities for them.

Reason for bringing to the Corporate Parenting Board:

To advise the CPB of the current position and to describe future plans.

Recommendations:

- The Board is asked to note the Corporate Parenting responsibilities of the Council with regard to ensuring Children in Care and Care Leavers have access to education and training opportunities that will assist them in their future.
- To note and endorse the proposed recommendations as set out in the report.

Background papers:

None

Resource and legal considerations:

Local authority duties to young people and care leavers are set out in the following legislation:

Children Act 1989
Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
Children and Social Work Act 2017
Education and Skills Act 2008 (sections 10, 12 and 68)

Education and Skills Act 2008 (sections 10, 12 and 68)

The DfE provides the framework to increase participation and reduce the proportion of young people NEET. Local Authorities have existing duties to encourage, enable and assist young people to participate in education or training. These duties are to:

- Secure sufficient suitable education and training provision for all young people who are over compulsory school age but under 19 and for those up to age 25 with a Learning Difficulty Assessment (LDA) or Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan in their area. To fulfil this,

local authorities must have a strategic overview of the provision available in their area and to identify and resolve gaps in provision.

- Make available to all young people aged 13-19 and to those up to age 25 with a Learning Difficulty Assessment (LDA) or Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) support that will encourage, enable or assist them to participate in education or training.
- Local authorities must promote the effective participation in education and training of young people aged 16, 17 years old in their area with a view to ensuring that those persons fulfil the duty to participate in education or training. A key element of this is identifying the young people in their area who are covered by the duty to participate and encouraging them to find a suitable education or training place.
- Local authorities must make arrangements to identify those aged 16, 17 years old and up to their 18th birthday who are not participating in education or training.

Council Corporate Plan Priorities:

- Children have the best possible start and are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well.
- People have increased independence, improved health and can positively contribute to their communities.

Citizen impact:

The report will describe the effort officers are making to improve outcomes for our young people

Environmental impact:

None

Performance management:

Corporate Parenting Board ensures everyone works together to fulfil the corporate parenting role and to hold each other to account for making this happen.

- it acts as the visible organisational champion for looked after children and young people and care leavers, promoting their rights, entitlements and aspirations;

- the mobilisation and optimum use of resources available to get the best chance of success for children in care and to support care leavers to positively transition to adulthood and independence.

Reducing inequalities:

Care experienced young people face additional barriers to achieving educationally and securing employment compared with the general population. This report will describe those barriers and the work of Walsall Council to help overcome them.

Consultation:

This report will be presented to the Children in Care Council's shadow CPB prior to the full CPB meeting on 1st July 2021.

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	The current picture in Walsall																											
1.0	Introduction																											
1.1	<p>Care leavers have poorer educational and life outcomes than the general population on average, and are underrepresented in higher education. All universities and colleges must now consider care leavers in their access and participation plans in order to encourage and support them into higher education but we are far from getting this right. With only 6% of care leavers nationally (and from Walsall) going into higher education, the need to ensure that our young people have the best possible chance at success and as such a number of initiatives have emerged in order to try and bridge this divide.</p> <p>Likewise, in regards to training and employment opportunities, many of our care leavers have not been afforded the stability that allows them to gain the skills that would make them more employable within the job market. This often leads to poor outcomes in all areas of their lives including maintaining suitable accommodation, experiencing poverty, mental health issues and involvement in criminality.</p>																											
1.2	<p>There are a range of factors that should be considered when assessing the young person's readiness to access Employment Education and Training which include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the young person's wishes and feelings • their current circumstances i.e accommodation and support network • the aspirations of carers/corporate parents • the planning and support that is offered prior to them prior to reaching 16 i.e. settled placements as most of our young people that entre university are from stable foster placements. • the personal characteristics and ability of the young person • their understanding of the support on offer to them 																											
1.3	<p>In Walsall, we currently have 291 care experienced young people aged 17-25, of which 79 aged between 17 and 21 are not in Education, Training or Employment. This means that our EET figure (those that are in education, employment and training) currently sits at 70% and those not in EET at 30%. This is a better position than in February this year, when the EET figure was 66%.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Age</th> <th>17</th> <th>18</th> <th>19</th> <th>20</th> <th>21</th> <th>Total</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>EET</td> <td>84%</td> <td>80%</td> <td>72%</td> <td>68%</td> <td>48%</td> <td>70%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>NEET</td> <td>16%</td> <td>20%</td> <td>28%</td> <td>42%</td> <td>52%</td> <td>30%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>The most recent (2019/20) national and regional data tells us that for those aged 19-21 inc., the % in ETE was:</p> <table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>England</td> <td>53%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>West Midlands</td> <td>50%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Walsall (Current Data)</td> <td>61%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Age	17	18	19	20	21	Total	EET	84%	80%	72%	68%	48%	70%	NEET	16%	20%	28%	42%	52%	30%	England	53%	West Midlands	50%	Walsall (Current Data)	61%
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A more detailed breakdown of all our 17-21 year olds tells us:

Age	17	18	19	20	21	Total	%
Full Time Education (not HE)	38	25	20	6		89	33.5
Full Time Higher Education		2	5	6	2	15	5.6
Full Time in Training or Employment	2	9	4	12	12	39	14.7
Part Time in Education (not HE)	12	8	2	3	2	27	10.1
Part Time in Higher Education				1		1	0.4
Part Time in Training or Employment	1		5	5	5	16	6.0
Not in Education Employment or Training – Illness or Disability	1	1	2	3	3	10	3.7
Not in Education Employment or Training – Other Circumstances	9	10	10	15	15	59	22.1
Not in Education Employment or Training – Pregnancy/Parenting			2	3	5	10	3.7
Total	63	55	50	54	44	266	

1.4

Within our young people that are not in ETE:

10 are not in education, employment or training due to pregnancy or parenting
 10 are not in education, employment or training due to illness or disability

This leaves a total of 59 young people that should be actively receiving support to improve their NEET status. However, other factors will impact on this as not all of the 59 will be 'job ready' or able to receive the right level of support owing to a number of factors. For example:

7 young people are currently in custody. Education provisions within prisons are currently suspended owing to Covid restrictions and this will ultimately impact upon offender's job prospects once they return to the community. We continue to liaise with our colleagues in probation and the prison service as part of our pathway planning to assist our young people in returning to the community.

6 young people are UASC and have no recourse to public funds. Whilst they are able to access educational support through ESOL, they are unable to gain employment owing to their immigration status.

Some have a significant/serious offending history which limits their options for work and training opportunities.

A further 12 young people are struggling with independence and are receiving significant support in order to ensure some stability. This sometimes means that their ability to enter the job market or focus on education and training is severely compromised. Other support such as stabilising their mental health or resolving accommodation issues is a priority and once resolved, a greater focus on education and training can begin.

As can be seen from the data above, the largest proportion of those not in EET are within the 19 – 21 age. This breakdown of the data allows us to look at how we can target our support.

As with all Local Authorities, the pandemic has impacted our young people that were working in industries that have been most affected by the restrictions. We have had a number of young people that were furloughed as well as others that have lost their

	<p>job entirely. In discussions regionally, we understand that all other areas have seen a change in their NEET figures with Warwickshire, Shropshire, Telford and Solihull which all report a decrease of their young people in education, employment and training. However, the recent lifting of restrictions, particularly in the hospitality sector has positively affected the data over the past 6 months.</p>
1.5	<p>As a way of tracking our young people here in Walsall, we hold monthly meetings called NAG (NEET Action Group) that comprises of a number of key professionals and agencies. These meetings are chaired by Lorraine Thompson, Virtual School Head and include representatives from Transitions and Leaving Care (TLC) Service and Black Country Impact. More recently we have extended this invitation to representatives from DWP and the wider Walsall Works programme of which the Black Country Impact is a part of. The difference between the two being that Walsall Works offers support to all Walsall residents over the age of 16 whilst Black Country Impact supports Care Leavers across the region.</p> <p>Due to low level of response from young people to this service, we have recently revised the function of our intervention at this group to provide a clearer focus on which young people are referred to Black Country Impact. In future, only those who have been encouraged to commit to support will be referred and before support starts, the young person's Personal Adviser will arrange to accompany them to their first meeting with Black Country Impact.</p>
2.0	<p>Walsall Council in house programmes for NEET</p>
2.1	<p>Virtual School – their role in supporting 16-18 year olds into Education, Employment & Training (EET)</p> <p>The Virtual School is responsible for liaising and working in partnership with agencies to support the education of children looked after. Lorraine Thompson is the Virtual School Lead and leads on strategic planning and developments, policy, new initiatives and service delivery.</p> <p>The Virtual School has a dedicated Post 16 team comprising of a key worker and careers adviser and mentor who work with young people aged 14-18 to ensure they are in appropriate post 16 education and are given the right support advice and guidance to make informed career choices:</p> <p>Our post 16 Key Worker</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attends Personal Education Plan meetings for young people aged 16 & 17 • Attends SEN annual reviews for young people with an EHCP • Works closely with schools, colleges and training providers to ensure our young people are receiving the right support • Attends the monthly NAG meeting • Provides resources/equipment to help young people moving into EET <p>Our Careers advisor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides advice and guidance on KS4 options • Delivers careers drop in sessions to young people in year 10 & 11 • Holds group career sessions in secondary schools • Support young people with college and university applications • Identify appropriate post 16 provision for young people who are NEET

- Provide advice and guidance on financial support moving into higher and further education

Our Mentor

- Supports young people to remove barriers to participation
- Advocates on behalf of the young person with schools and college
- Attends interviews/meetings with young people

Since the start of the pandemic, the virtual school has continued to have face to face and virtual meetings with our young people to provide careers advice. They have supported 10 young people with university applications for this forthcoming year. They have also supported 3 young people onto a Council apprenticeship and are in the process of appointing a care leaver onto a full time Teaching Assistant apprenticeship within the Virtual School.

The Virtual School continues to provide support and guidance to our young people who are currently NEET by identifying appropriate provision and/or referring them onto other services such as IMPACT and Walsall Works.

Alongside the work of the virtual school, staff we also have other mechanisms in place to enable us to identify young people who may become NEET and need additional support at an early age. They have incorporated the Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI) into the personal education plans. This is a scoring system that enables us to identify young people who may become NEET so support and resources can be put in place before the young person leaves school in year 11.

In addition, as part of our reviews into pathway plans, we are incorporating a revised assessment of need to be undertaken by the social worker once a young person reaches the age of 15 years and 9 months. This assessment will focus on independence planning and will inform the Pathway Plan that replaces the Care Plan at the age of 16. Whilst this assessment will focus on all areas of preparation for independence, a large focus will be on the education and training opportunities that should be afforded to our young people.

There are currently over 40 young people signed up to our 'Aspire to University' (A2U) Project which is run by Wolverhampton university, Walsall, Wolverhampton, Sandwell and Staffordshire Virtual Schools to encourage more young people to move onto further and higher education.

They continue to work alongside Walsall Works and Endless Possibilities to develop a pre apprenticeship scheme for care leavers which will provide longer term support for young people prior to moving onto an apprenticeship. This is an ongoing piece of work that will feed into our Local Offer for Care Leavers.

The Pupil premium funding received by the DfE to help support looked after children aged 5-16 is extended to help support care leavers up to the age of 19. The funding has been used to provide equipment and resources to enable young people to move from NEET to EET i.e. uniform and equipment, travel expenses, driving lessons, extra tuition and online training courses.

As part of our in house support to children and young people, we have access to a dedicated careers advisor based within our Virtual School. As part of her role, she is able to provide support with CV writing, applications to colleges and universities,

finding suitable university accommodation and other practical support that may be required. In addition, our Personal Advisors have supported young people with visiting university and college campuses to open days as well as signposting information in regards to relevant training and employment opportunities.

Transitions and Leaving Care Service

As part of our support to our young people, Personal Advisors work closely with partners in the VS, DWP, Impact and education and training providers.

Our links with local colleges are good and regular discussion with them in regards to education and training options for our young people takes place. This has often led to bespoke packages of support being offered to those that require it. For example, K is one of our young people attending Walsall College undertaking a painting and decorating course. As a parent herself, she has overcome enormous struggles and at one stage was fearful that she would lose the care of her child. Through a robust package of support by both her PA, family and the college, she has made great progress and is now looking to be involved in mentoring other young people in similar situations.

Across the service we currently have 17 young people age 17-24 at University with another 10 potentially applying for this forthcoming September (4 of which are social work Degrees). There is a slightly larger number making applications for this year as some young people chose to defer a year owing to the pandemic. We have been offering additional support to our young people currently at university as some have struggled with the online learning and have felt despondent by their experiences not being what they would have hoped.

As part of the initial support we offer to our university students, Personal Advisors work jointly with the Virtual School to identify places, secure university accommodation and link in with the student leads. Many universities across the country have a dedicated support for care leavers and so we have now developed a good portfolio of those that are particularly supportive and can advise our young people accordingly.

In order to ensure the best level of support, we also signpost our young people to other agencies such as the Care Leavers Association and Propel Project (part of the Become Charity), both of which offer support and guidance to care leavers seeking to enter into higher education and further training opportunities.

We also identify and signpost our young people with a range of training and development opportunities. For example, we have one young person that has recently been accepted on the civil service internship programme within the business, energy and industrial strategy department. As part of his preparation, his Personal Advisor, along with the VS assisted him with interview techniques in order to boost his confidence. He was delighted to be accepted and we have high hopes for his success.

We also have access to Walsall's 'Endless Possibilities' Apprenticeship Programme. This targeted Programme for Care Leavers was specifically established to provide those Care Leavers who are interested in pursuing a career within the local authority, the experience and qualifications needed to secure permanent employment in order to achieve adult independence and economic wellbeing.

	<p>The commitment was to ring-fence 17 Apprenticeships vacancies (around 10% of our overall apprenticeship target) for Care Leavers. It managed to exceed that initial target last year as 20 young people were initially recruited as service areas were able to apply for a wage subsidy through Walsall Works to offset a proportion of the salary costs for the young person. The care leaver is paid the national minimum rates of pay for age and not the apprentice rate per hour in order to support the young person's costs of living independently. The young person receives all the usual Walsall Council terms and conditions of employment including paid holidays, staff benefits including access to the Council's wider learning and development offer. Walsall Works Programme makes a contribution to the salary costs for the Care Leaver for the first year and this is calculated based on the age of the young person, typically between 40% - 50% of the annual salary costs.</p> <p>Two of our young people have done exceptionally well with one having recently completed his level 3 as a Personal Trainer and another about to embark on her higher apprenticeship at Level 4 in Revenue. However, the dropout rate for young people in apprenticeships is very high. Feedback from them and their supervisors describes the high levels of support required to maintain the apprenticeship. Therefore we have become more mindful of who we refer to the scheme and will provide additional support in future.</p> <p>In terms of other apprenticeship schemes, we have had 2 young people accepted on the NHS Live and Work apprenticeship programme. This is a scheme set up regionally with local hospitals and offers a variety of apprenticeships within the NHS as well as on site living facilities. In addition to this, we have a number of our young people working within the NHS and Social Care that have played an active role throughout the pandemic. Their efforts have made us extremely proud.</p> <p>As a way of ensuring that our young people have access to as many opportunities as possible, we attend regional meetings with other Local Authorities across the region as well as attending sessions offered through the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum. We have also currently applying to be a part of a Local Authority Peer Learning Group around increasing employment opportunities for care experienced young people. A small number of LA's will be chosen to take part in a total of six sessions throughout this year by showcasing a project that they are currently working on of which we hope to use our pre-apprenticeship programme.</p>
3.0	Regional and National Initiatives
3.1	Walsall Works and Black Country Impact
3.2	<p>Since its inception in 2012, the Walsall Works programme has supported its residents, particularly young people aged 16-24 years, to improve their skills base through access to functional skills, upskilling in the workforce, apprenticeships and retraining.</p> <p>Despite restrictions in relation to Covid-19 and limited face to face engagement over the last few months, the programme has still been able to maintain delivery in some partner venues alongside a calendar of virtual roadshows, a virtual expo, events, sector specific sessions and continue to job match employer vacancies with local people in a number of sectors.</p>

The proportion of working age adults (16-64) with no qualifications has fallen gradually since 2004 demonstrating improvement in skills against all ages. However, Walsall does continue to underperform compared with the national averages. Walsall has a lower proportion of non-qualified adults than those in the West Midlands Combined region, and is significantly better than the Black Country average. For example:

- Walsall: 21,000 (12.7%) of working age had no qualifications
- Wolverhampton: 28,200 (17.3%) of working age had no qualifications
- Dudley: 31,000 (16.4%) of working age had no qualifications
- Sandwell: 41,600 (20.3%) of working age had no qualifications

Black Country Impact is made up of 5 delivery partners across the region in order to offer free training, help and advice to our care leavers in securing jobs and training opportunities. It is funded by the European Social Fund and Youth Improvement Initiative and can offer practical and financial assistance such as clothing for interviews, travel cards and childcare provision.

Through collaboratively working together across teams they are maximising the chances of success for our most vulnerable young people i.e. those with SEND, care leavers, young offenders, teenage parents, and those at risk of long term unemployment. The pandemic has seen a greater rise in the volume of young benefit claimants nationwide and many of our care leavers have been impacted upon by working in industries that have been significantly affected by the pandemic.

In Walsall, we currently have two Impact workers that work in partnership with the Personal Advisers based in our Transitions and Leaving Care Service. All of our eligible young people are considered for this service and are routinely discussed as part of the monthly NAG meetings. Updates are provided as to the work that has been undertaken and whether the young people are engaging with the support on offer. As a way of tracking the success, a log of contacts is kept by the Impact workers and shared with TLC Managers in order to ensure that all opportunities are explored and actions followed.

4.0 Kickstart Programme

4.1 The Kickstart Scheme is a national DWP programme and was announced by the Chancellor in July 2020, as a way to reduce the huge influx of young benefit claimants who will be displaced due to lack of employment opportunity within businesses facing economic challenges. Kickstart provides funding to employers to create 6 month placements for 16 to 24 year olds who are in receipt of benefits. Walsall Council will act as a 'gateway' organisation and will administer the programme which aims to make available 150 local work placements. Each placement is a minimum of 25 hours per week and is paid at minimum wage. The Kickstart programme will have skills and training embedded through the work placement to ensure that young people are equipped to take up employment once the 6 month placement has ended.

As a way of embedding this in our support to our Care Leavers, representatives from the Department for Work and Pensions presented the programme to Personal Advisors so that this could be incorporated into our Pathway Planning. Walsall Works has now launched its Kickstart offer that went live in Jan 2021. We will feed back the effectiveness of the programme at the CPB.

5.0	Care Leavers Covenant
5.1	<p>In July 2016, the Government published a major policy document ‘Keep on Caring’ to support young people from care to independence. A key policy commitment in the paper is a strategic pledge to introduce a Care Leaver Covenant. The Covenant is a promise made by the private, public and voluntary sectors to provide support for care leavers aged 16-25 to help them to live independently. Whilst all young people who leave care at 16, 17 or 18 are afforded statutory support from the local authority in the region in which they live, wider society also needs to play a part. In order to provide a greater level of support at this crucial stage during the transition of care leavers to adulthood, the covenant aims to provide care leavers with opportunities to enter the world of work, such as offering work experience placements, work shadowing placements, internships, traineeships and apprenticeships.</p> <p>A number of our young people have been referred to the Covenant and some have received good levels of support which has opened up opportunities that may not have been available to them. One of our young people has also been filmed offering some feedback on his experiences with the Covenant as part of their promotional material.</p> <p>As part of our work with the Care Leavers Covenant, we have been consulting with Local Universities and Colleges to offer additional support to care leavers attending higher education provisions. The Covenant aims to employ regional Covenant Progression Coordinators based within education provisions so that care leavers receive access to support both during and post study. This initiative is currently only in the early consultation stages but interest has been high and meetings with Local Authorities across the region have now taken place to move this forward.</p>
6.0	Peer Learning Programme
6.1	<p>In March 2021, Walsall became one of 10 local authorities within the Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum which will collaborate to share good practice. The programme is funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, which is supporting 30 voluntary organisations to improve outcomes for young people with care experience. By November 2021, our plan is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design a pre-apprenticeship programme • Support our care leavers to gain valuable employability skills • Creating work opportunities and placements within the private sector • Strengthen our local offer to care leavers around employment <p>Progress to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through our procurement process we have met with an organisation that can offer a range of opportunities including a 3 month paid work experience offer, a virtual work experience through Speakers 4 Schools with priorities given to Walsall Care Leavers. • Contacts through the Black Country Apprenticeship Ambassador network have led us to an opportunity with a Tramway construction network of employers linked to a sector skills academy • Again through the Apprenticeship Ambassador Network we have linked to local Housing companies who can offer ‘trade’ Apprenticeships which is something we cannot offer • Guaranteed Interviews for Care Leavers has been extended out to our maintained schools

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Recruitment Agency is now providing 1 to 1 support to young people around interview skills which is bespoke to the individual • Again through our procurement we have arranged for our TLC Team to meet with our Framework of Apprenticeship Training Providers and this has led to a meeting with a training provider who has opened a leather academy (a very local skill that has been revitalised in Walsall, at one stage the Queen's handbags were made in Walsall). The Team Manager will be discussing how they can support our Care Leavers. <p>We are also looking to organise a roadshow of local employers and training providers and to include a commitment to corporate social responsibility in the form of opportunities for our young people when employers bid for new contracts with Walsall Council.</p>
7.0	Summary and Recommendations:
7.1	<p>Overall our NEET data is comparable, if not better than that we are seeing regionally and nationally. As we progress with some of the initiatives outlined above, the landscape is likely to continue to improve. We are particularly hopeful that the Kickstart programme will allow local businesses to offer our young people opportunities in sectors that may not have previously been available to them and open up jobs that will inevitably assist our local economy.</p> <p>We are currently looking at ways in which we can widen our scope as a service and increase our engagement with local providers and educations provisions so that the opportunities and initiatives are shared more frequently. Rather than open up the invitation to our in house NAG meetings, the view is that a separate steering group could be formed in order for local employers and education providers to share opportunities at a regional forum. As such, we will consult with the Care Leavers Covenant as to whether this is something that they could assist us with. Although just launched, this may also be something that is offered as part of the Kickstart programme.</p> <p>As a number of our young people have expressed an interest in joining the police or armed forces, we are looking at ways in which we can engage these agencies in how we can support care leavers through the application process. We understand that West Midlands Police offer an apprenticeship scheme and so we are looking at whether there is any scope for these to be ring fenced for care leavers.</p> <p>Whilst we currently have a good level of careers advice/support for our 16/17 year olds through the virtual school, there is a gap in regards to the support offered to them post 18. This is because Impact only works with those that are NEET and so the lower level of advice and support (what was once offered through Connexions), no longer exists. In order to overcome this, some areas have employed specific PA's within their leaving care services to plug this gap but for us here in Walsall there is currently no such resource and may be something that should be considered.</p> <p>As part of our Local Offer to Care Leavers, we are in the process of designing a pre apprenticeship programme that aims to ensure that all of our young people that wish to join the workforce, are fully equipped to do so. This will include tailoring specific roles for our care leavers so that they can have a 'taste' of what options may be available to them and incentivise them to move into certain fields at a pace that will ensure their success. This is a joint project with the Virtual School and our Apprenticeship Programme Lead.</p> <p>We are also planning to build on our support to those young people leaving custody as the current issues relating to lack of education and support currently in prisons is</p>

going to leave some of our young people more vulnerable once they return to the community. There is not currently any focused work taking place but our aim is to complete an audit and dip sample some of our recent young people to see what gaps/key themes that we can identify that we can pick up with partner agencies. This piece of work will be completed by the end of August 2021.

Mick McCarthy
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