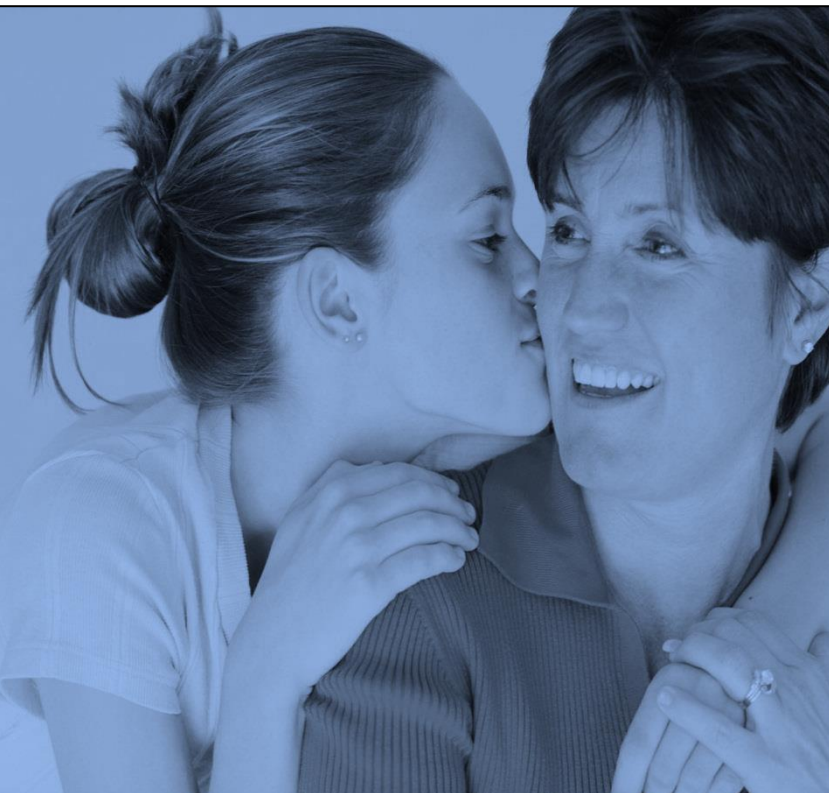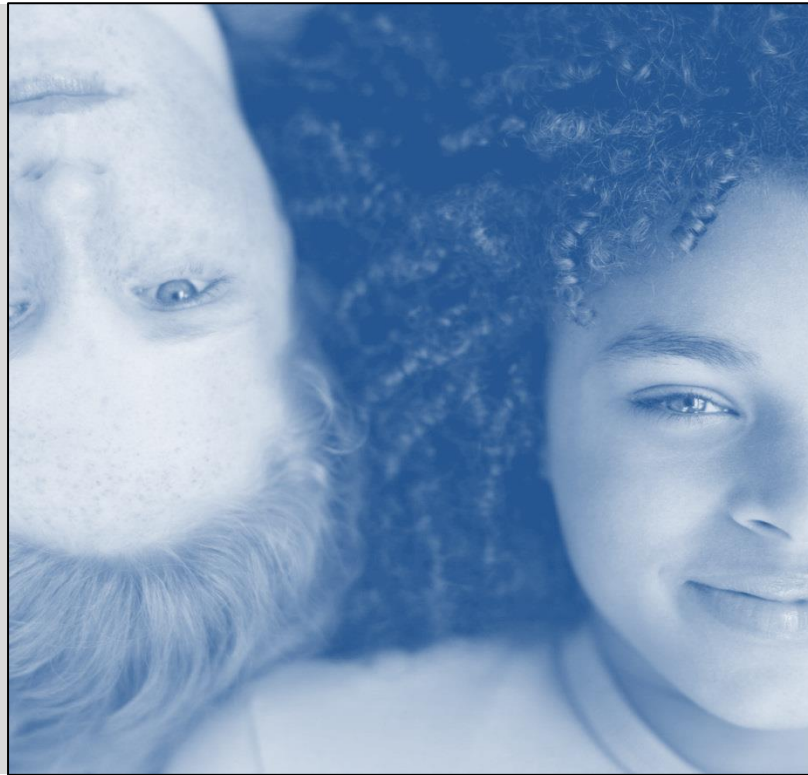# National Capital Region

Foster Care Annual Report 2013

METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON
Council of Governments

About the Report

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) is a regional organization of Washington area local governments. COG is composed of 22 local governments surrounding our nation's capital, plus area members of the Maryland and Virginia legislatures, the U.S. Senate, and the U.S. House of Representatives.

Each year COG surveys child welfare systems in the National Capital Region. The purpose of the annual survey and report is to educate the media, general public, and other important stakeholders, of recent trends occurring in the region's foster care systems.

The members of COG that participate in this regional survey and report are the District of Columbia, Frederick, Montgomery, Prince George's and Charles Counties in Maryland, and Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, Prince William Counties, and the City of Alexandria in Virginia. Foster care data on the following independent cities, who are also members of COG, are included in the report within their county's data: the Cities of Bowie, College Park, Gaithersburg, Greenbelt, and Takoma Park in Maryland, and the Cities of Fairfax, Falls Church, Manassas and Manassas Park in Virginia.

This report is intended as an educational tool to inform those who may be unfamiliar with the foster care system, and update those who are. The desired outcome is that readers of this report will become more involved in the foster care system as advocates for vulnerable children and families in our communities.

The highlights of the 2013 survey are:

- **Enhanced Diversion Programs:** Over 800 children were diverted from entering the system, due to a regional focus on prevention.
- **Fewer Entries:** As compared to 12/31/2008, there was a 36% reduction in the number of children in foster care on 12/31/2013, and a 25% reduction in the number of children entering the system throughout 2013.
- **Reduced Use of Congregate Care:** 3 out of every 4 children in foster care in our region were placed in home settings, rather than congregate care.
- **Overrepresentation of African American children in care:** African American children represent 70% of children in the foster care system.
- **Growing teenage population in the system:** 64% of all children in foster care are age 11 and above. Teenagers, age 11 and above, represent the largest share of children waiting to be adopted.
- **Many Recruited Homes Vacant:** 40% of all agency foster homes were vacant on 12/31/2013.
- **More Youth with Potential to Age-Out:** 583 children had a permanency goal that might lead them to age-out of foster care.

How Do Children Enter Foster Care

Families come to the attention of the foster care system when a call is made to Child Protective Services alleging child abuse or neglect. In the course of an assessment or investigation, a Child Protective Services social worker may decide to remove a child from their birth home to keep him or her safe.

Within hours of a removal, the child abuse and neglect allegations are brought before a family court judge. When a judgment is made in the case, the abuse or neglect charges are substantiated or unsubstantiated; there are also instances where the judge rules that the child be returned home or with relatives, while the family receives supportive services.

In accordance with national trends, foster care systems in the National Capital Region have seen fewer children entering the system the last several years, and are also serving fewer children within the system.

As compared to the point in time count on 12/31/2008, there was a 36% reduction in the number of children in foster care on 12/31/2013. This trend is occurring partly because of a regional focus on prevention.

Prevention Programs

Child welfare agencies have made investments in prevention programs that provide a stronger safety net for families, and improve cross communication between private community-based providers and social services. Therefore, at the first sign of difficulty, a family on the fringes can be connected to community-based services. These types of prevention programs are often referred to as Family Preservation services.

Family Preservation services vary by county and may include: shelter care, food assistance, transportation vouchers, day care vouchers, mental health assessments, mental health therapy, substance abuse, work force training, and parenting classes. These services may be directly provided by Child Welfare Agencies, but more often they are offered by private agencies.

In addition to family preservation, the technique of diversion is another prevention program that has affected the region's reduction of children in foster care. In diversion cases, rather than removing the child, the child is placed with qualified relatives or fictive kin. In contrast to family preservation cases, diverted cases are severe enough to constitute removal, but instead some major intervention or placement arrangement is secured, usually with a relative or fictive kin, such as god parents. Often family involvement or partnership meetings (FIM or FPM) are the conduit for conversations with extended kin that result in diversion. In the National Capital Region during 2013, over 800 children were diverted from entering the system.

Prevention Program Success Story

A Haitian immigrant, married with one child, came to the attention of social services due to domestic violence by her husband. The agency assisted the parent with initiating divorce proceedings, filing for child support, obtaining TANF and connecting her with a housing/employment program in the area.
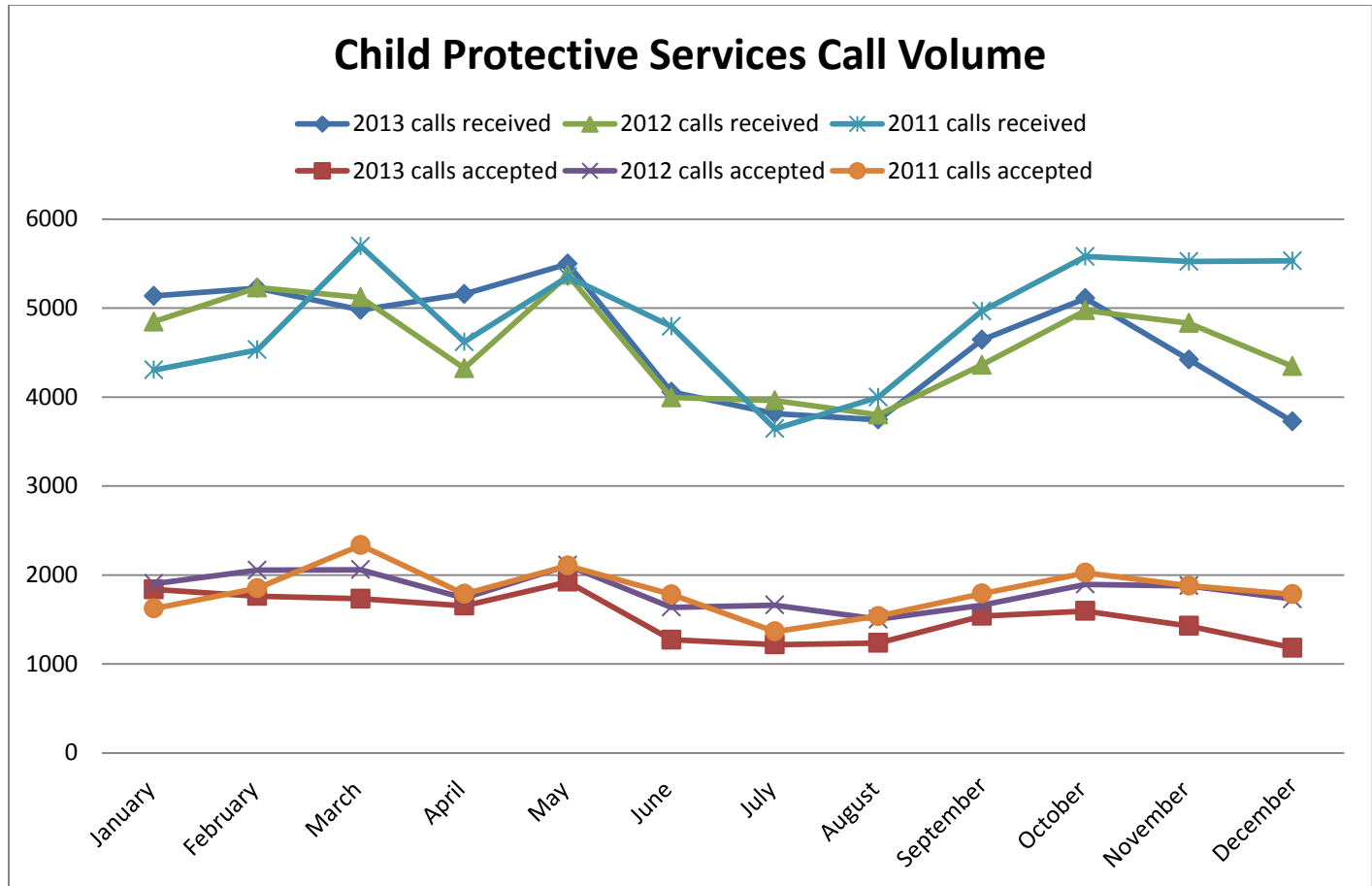
The mother has no family in this country besides her husband and his family, so it was very difficult for her to separate from her husband, but it was in the best interest of her and her child's safety to do so. The agency social worker built rapport and took small steps with the mother to gain her trust. The mother is now working part-time, her daughter is in daycare and she has made a few friends in the community and has stable housing of her own.

Child Protective Services Call Volume

Child Protective Services (CPS) Call Volume does not measure the number of children who enter the system; rather the call volume is purely a cumulative count of calls alleging child abuse and neglect, and the portion of those calls that are investigated. The count on the chart below provides an overview of call volume, and as in past years, May tracks the highest volume of calls.

Mandated child abuse reporters are often connected to schools. In classrooms across the region school officials tend to contact Child Protective Services during the school year when their student shows signs of abuse or neglect – truancy, hunger, dirty clothing, etc. Often, out of concern for their student's safety over the summer months when supervision is more lax, teachers tend to contact Child Protective Services before the end of the school year in the month of May so a CPS assessment is done before summer break.

Child Protective Services Call Volume

Legend:
- 2013 calls received
- 2012 calls received
- 2011 calls received
- 2013 calls accepted
- 2012 calls accepted
- 2011 calls accepted

Children in Foster care

Children who enter foster care have experienced abuse or neglect. As compared to the point in time count on 12/31/2008, there was a 36% reduction in the number of children in foster care in 2013, and a 25% reduction in the number of children entering the system in 2013. This trend does not necessarily mean that incidents of child abuse or neglect are on the decline. Rather, prevention programs are more robust and agencies are connecting with troubled families earlier to support thwarting the need for a CPS investigation, and potential removal.
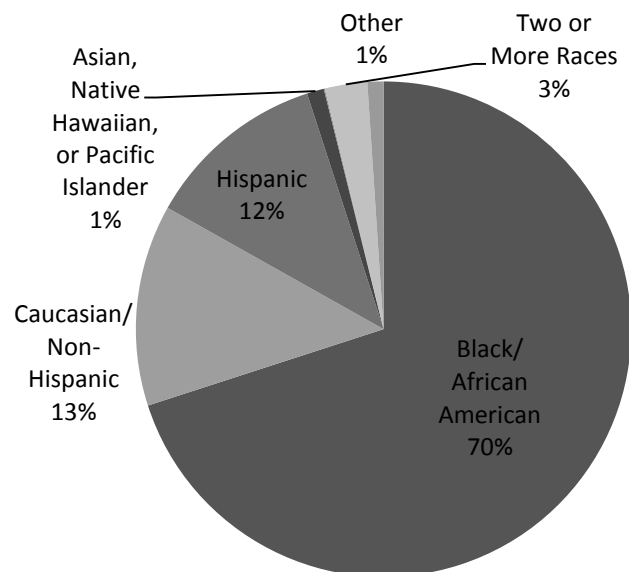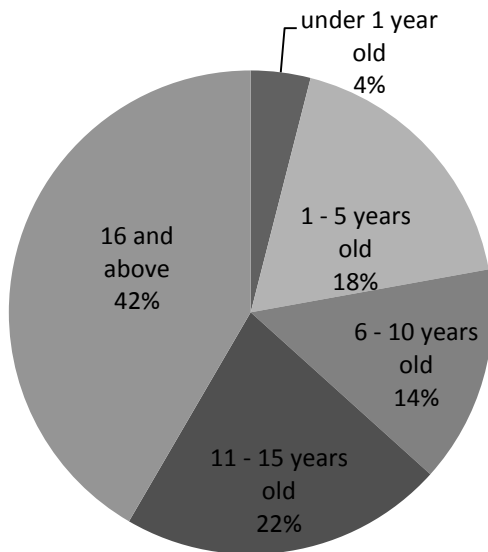
Agencies understand the toll a removal takes on a family and the trauma it causes a child. If a foster care placement can be safely avoided through prevention, preservation, or diversion to relatives, it is the best practice for the child and for the family.

As a region, the reduced number of children in foster care coincides with National data. The region's focus on prevention, preservation and diversion are also consistent with the practice and policies employed by other states throughout the country.

Children in Foster Care (as of 12/31)						
Jurisdictions	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
District of Columbia	2264	2103	2007	1744	1430	1215
Frederick County	140	175	157	142	148	128
Montgomery County	575	546	516	498	433	385
Prince George's County	608	599	592	595	593	515
Charles County	106	113	110	105	95	105
City of Alexandria	181	167	126	126	97	85
Arlington County	147	133	115	101	87	93
Fairfax County	394	370	337	326	289	252
Loudoun County	87	97	83	64	51	59
Prince William County	99	91	110	115	126	124
Total	4601	4394	4153	3816	3349	2961

The demographics of children in foster care have remained virtually unchanged year to year. Seventy percent of the systems' racial composition in our region is African American, and 64% of children in foster care are age 11 and above.

Children in Foster Care - by Age

- under 1 year old 4%
- 1 - 5 years old 18%
- 6 - 10 years old 14%
- 11 - 15 years old 22%
- 16 and above 42%

- Other 1%
- Two or More Races 3%
- Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander 1%
- Hispanic 12%
- Caucasian/Non-Hispanic 13%
- Black/African American 70%

Children in Foster Care -- By Race

Foster and Adoptive Family Recruitment

Identifying family foster homes for teenagers is a challenge. In 2013, only 15 children aged 16 and above were adopted, yet children within this age group represent 42% of the system, the largest population in the system. Children, 16 and above, also represented 26% of those waiting to be adopted in 2013.

Harnessing creative recruitment strategies, agencies utilize features on Wednesday's Child to improve the rate of older child adoptions. Faith-based outreach, presentations to high school PTAs, and tables at events targeting parents of teenagers have also helped agencies recruit more foster parents for teens. Agencies have also started to invite their existing foster parents to recruit on their behalf, and some have offered incentives. One agency held a contest and offered a cash prize to the foster parent that recruited the most friends and family members to become foster or adoptive parents for teenagers.

While these creative strategies have assisted jurisdictions with their recruitment efforts, some recruited homes are left vacant. Forty percent of all agency foster homes were vacant on 12/31/2013.

A home may be vacant for a number of reasons. For instance, a foster parent may be experiencing a personal issue at the time data was collected. More often agencies report that a foster home is vacant because of a foster parent's unwillingness to accept the children that the agency currently has. Although the family was recruited, trained, and prepared under the auspices that the agency is seeking homes for older children, when a placement of this kind is offered some foster families reject the placement.

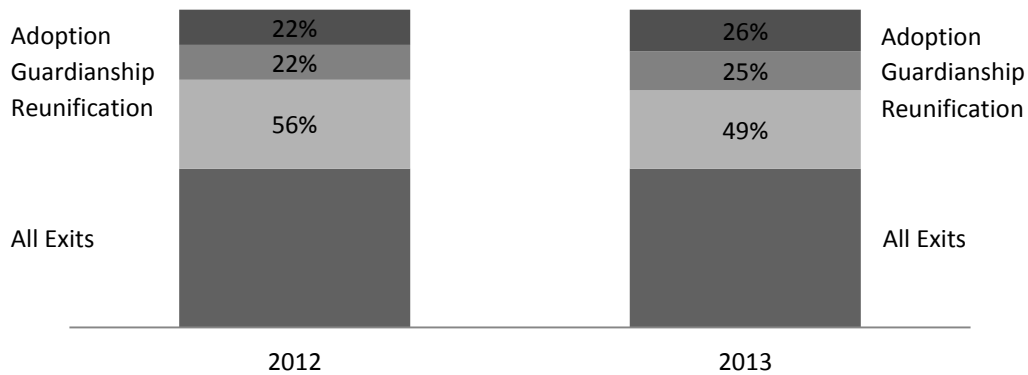| Agency Family Foster Homes		
(On 12/31/2013)		
Jurisdiction	Overall Number	Vacant Homes
District of Columbia	1004	368 (37%)
Frederick County	66	39 (59%)
Montgomery County	212	96 (45%)
Prince George's County	202	52 (26%)
Charles County	62	11 (18%)
City of Alexandria	48	26 (54%)
Arlington County	42	12 (29%)
Fairfax County	108	49 (45%)
Loudoun County	78	59 (76%)
Prince William County	92	49 (53%)
Total	**1914**	**761 (40%)**

When a family foster home cannot be found for a teenager, congregate care or a privately licensed foster home are the only placement alternatives. If the teen's needs require considerable supervision, that teenager is often placed in group/congregate care or in an institutional setting. Agencies firmly believe children deserve to be in families not institutions. In 2013, 3 out of every 4 children in foster care in our region were placed in home settings, rather than congregate care.

There are fiscal savings when family foster homes are secured versus purchasing congregate care beds through private providers. According to a 2010 report by Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Rightsizing Congregate Care*, "institutional placements are three to five times the cost of family-based placements. Thus, savings from congregate care reduction could be diverted to community-based services (including evidence-based interventions) to improve permanence and other long-term outcomes for children." This report underscores the importance of foster family recruitment, retention, and the link between how the right type of foster placement can greatly improve a child's chance at exiting the system with permanency through adoption or guardianship.

Exiting Foster Care

As established earlier in this report, children enter foster care due to abuse or neglect. Children exit foster care when they are reunified with their birth family, secure guardianship with a foster parent or relative, are adopted by a foster parent or pre-adoptive parent, or age-out/emancipate from the system at 18 or 21 years old. The graph below shows the portion of those who exited care in 2012 and 2013 to permanency after being reunified, placed in guardianship, or adoption. The state of Virginia does not subsidize guardianship or kinship care. Below the bar graph is a chart showing the number of children who aged-out of foster care without permanency.

Exits to Permanency

Emancipation – Aged Out (as of 12/31)						
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
District of Columbia	173	177	249	178	173	130
Frederick County	17	8	4	12	2	11
Montgomery County	0	32	37	32	33	36
Prince George's County	43	67	45	55	51	57
Charles County	5	9	6	11	5	11
City of Alexandria	11	11	17	13	14	27
Arlington County	14	15	0	12	6	7
Fairfax County	24	27	39	40	43	43
Loudoun County	6	5	4	6	5	2
Prince William County	8	8	10	13	8	12
Total	**301**	**359**	**411**	**372**	**340**	**336**

The Relationship between Waiting Children, APPLA and Emancipation

The number of children waiting to be adopted has seen a considerable decline over the years. In 2013, there was a 64% reduction in the number of children waiting to be adopted as compared to 2008.

Children whose parental rights are terminated must consent to an adoption. In most states, the age of consent is 14 years old, but in Maryland and 4 other states, the age of consent is 10 years old. If a child, as young as 10 years old, chooses to not consent to be adopted, they may encourage their social worker or recruiter to seek guardianship with a relative, fictive kin or their current or past foster parent, or they may fall into a category called APPLA.

APPLA, Another Planned Permanency Living Arrangement, is a permanency goal that is set by a judge in family court once all parties agree. Jurisdictions in the National Capital Region report that setting an APPLA permanency goal is the very last resort, and is typically accompanied by another concurrent goal like reunification or guardianship.

Children with the APPLA permanency goal, as one of or their only goal, are prepared for independent living and are on the trajectory to age-out of foster care when they reach the age of 18 or 21.

Over the last two years, the region has seen fewer children age-out of foster care, as noted on the previous page. For those who do, aging out of foster care can adversely impact a young person's quality of life leading to homelessness, incarceration, and unplanned pregnancies.

APPLA (as of 12/31)		
	2012	2013
District of Columbia	288	202
Frederick County	43	42
Montgomery County	106	116
Prince George's County	191	183
Charles County	22	18
City of Alexandria	2	1
Arlington County	3	2
Fairfax County	6	7
Loudoun County	1	1
Prince William County	11	11
Total	673	583

As a region, 583 children had a permanency goal of APPLA, and are on the trajectory to age-out of foster care. While the number of children that have actually emancipated from foster care or aged-out has declined, having 583 children on pace to exit the system in the years ahead without a permanent home is of considerable concern.

With 64% of children in the system 11 years old and above, and 70% of those being African American, finding foster and adoptive homes or reunifying African American older children is the focus in our region. It is critical that agencies in our region continue to concurrently plan and identify caretakers for the older set of children in the system, whether they just entered foster care or are on the verge of aging out.

This survey and report is possible through the support of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) Child Welfare Program. Additionally, the report would not have been possible without the participating jurisdictions and representatives who served on the data workgroup. The data workgroup members included:

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