

FINAL PROGRESS REPORT

Evaluation of Circle of Learning

May 2017

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1. About The Community and Voluntary Group

Background

The Programme

The Circle of Learning Programme is a networking and capacity building programme which aims to impart learning and build confidence in marginalised communities across Northern Ireland in order to increase a sense of belonging and encourage places and spaces that are safe for all. The programme offers community groups opportunities for networking, sharing of best practice, training, leadership development and the opportunity to complete social action projects.

Circle of Learning recruited 4 host organisations in Derry/Londonderry, Belfast, Lisburn and Lurgan known as hubs who worked with 4 marginalised groups in each area, supporting them to progress in their development and to identify and address local issues.

The programme targeted areas and groups with limited previous involvement in peace building and which continue to face challenges relating to the legacy of the conflict.

The following groups took part in the programme:

Belfast Hub (Host organisation: Institute of Conflict Research)

- Lower Shankill Women's Group
- Mornington Women's Group
- NB WISP (North Belfast)
- Recon Women's Group (Hollywood)

Lisburn Hub (Host organisation: Resurgam Trust)

- Lisburn SAFE
- Resurgam Women's Network
- Resurgam Youth Initiative
- The Welcome Project

Lurgan Hub (Host organisation: Jethro Centre)

- Community Outreach Group
- Lurgan College/St Ronan's College Shared Education Programme
- North Lurgan Community Association
- Queen's Street Residents Association

Derry/Londonderry Hub (Host organisation: Leafair Community Association)

- Glenabbey Community Association
- Londonderry Bands Forum
- Skeoge Camerateurs
- Skeoge House Women's Group

2. Profile of Participants

A total of 568 participants were recorded taking part in activities under Circle of Learning across the 16 groups. Almost 65% (n=368) of participants were female and 35% (n=200) were male.

As shown in Figure 1 below, there were roughly equal numbers of participants from Catholic and Protestant community backgrounds.

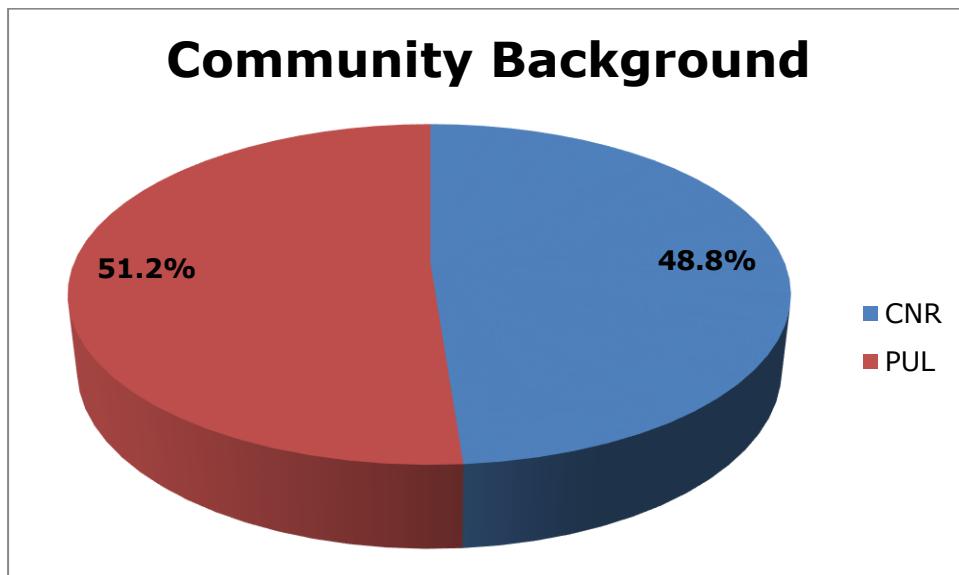


Figure 1: Circle of Learning Activity Participants by Community Background

More detailed profile information was available for 103 core participants from the 16 groups who completed monitoring forms. As shown in Figure 2 below, participants varied widely in age, with the largest number falling in the age category of 26-45.

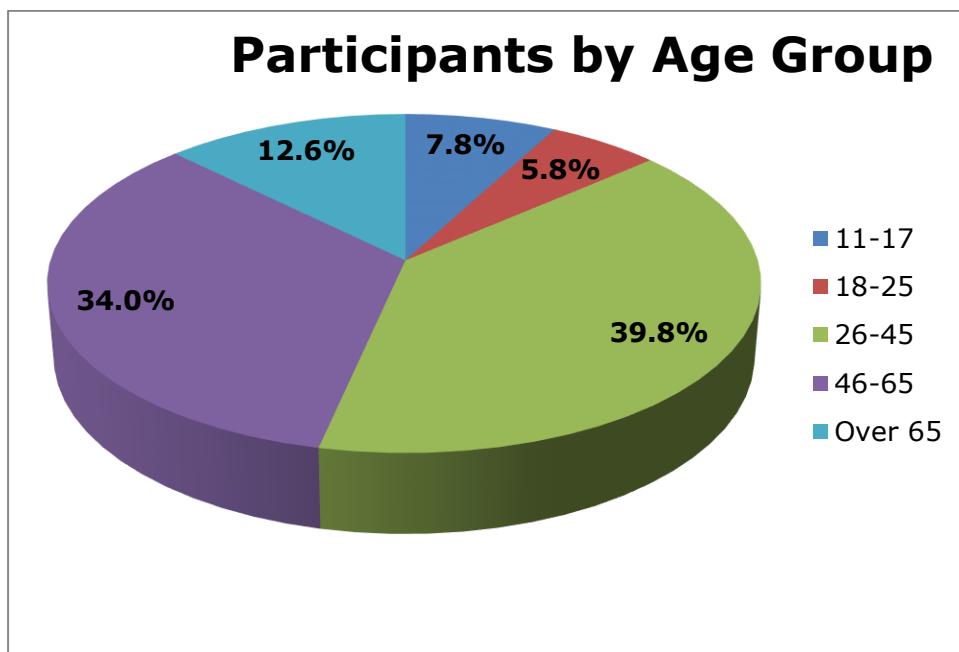


Figure 2: Circle of Learning Core Participants by Age Group

3. Programme Deliverables and outcomes

Programme Activities as per Annex C of Letter of Offer

Activity	Target date	How much had you planned to do	Outcomes	How much have you done
A networking and capacity building programme to impart learning and build confidence in order to increase a sense of community belonging and encourage places and spaces that are safe for all	March 2017	<p>4 hubs created, linking host organisations with 4 low capacity groups in each area.</p> <p>16 groups receive professional mentoring support.</p> <p>16 local action plans produced.</p>	<p>Groups feel better able to influence local decisions made in their neighbourhood</p> <p>Participants feel safer attending events in venues associated with the other community</p> <p>Participating groups are better connected, with new linkages developed with public bodies and other communities</p>	<p>100% Completed - 4 hubs created in Belfast, Derry/LDerry, Lisburn & Lurgan who have supported 4 smaller groups in each area. 9 groups represent PUL community, 3 CNR, and 4 are mixed.</p> <p>16 groups received professional mentoring support from hub leaders and staff in host organisations</p> <p>100% completed – 16 action plans delivered: <i>Queen Street</i> – strategic planning day; <i>Lurgan SEP</i> – 60 students from Lurgan College and St Ronans College took part in shared history study visit to L'derry; <i>Lurgan Community Outreach Group</i> – Christian Unity week church service and shared history study visit with Meath Peace Group; <i>North Lurgan Community Association</i> – social event for senior citizens; <i>Lower Shankill Women's Group</i> – strategic planning residential;</p>

				<p><i>Mornington Women's Group</i> – strategic planning day;</p> <p><i>Recon Women's Group</i> – OCN in Dealing with the Past and art therapy to look at legacy of the conflict;</p> <p><i>NB WISP</i> - OCN in Dealing with the Past and art therapy to look at legacy of the conflict;</p> <p><i>Glenabbey Community Association</i> – family fun day and publicity/communication;</p> <p><i>Londonderry Bands Forum</i> – cross community Ulster Scots music and dancing classes;</p> <p><i>Skeoge Camerateurs</i> - Organised Christmas fair to exhibit work;</p> <p><i>Skeoge Women's Group</i> – good governance training;</p> <p><i>Lisburn Welcome Project</i> – volunteer training and development;</p> <p><i>Resurgam Youth Initiative</i> – strategic planning and good governance training;</p> <p><i>Lisburn Safe</i> – volunteer training and development;</p> <p><i>Resurgam Women's Network</i> – storytelling project exploring role of women in the community</p>
		16 networking meetings hosted by local groups.		Approx. 40 meetings held between 4 hubs, smaller groups and hub leaders

Summary of Outcomes Measured

Evidence for the achievement of project outcomes was gathered primarily through baseline/post-project group skills audits, action plan delivery reports, and mentor reports. Core participants also completed baseline and end of project surveys, with 103 paired before and after responses available for analysis.

Outcome: Participating groups can more effectively deliver their activities and contribute to local development

Indicator: No. of groups demonstrating improved skills and knowledge to operate effectively and to contribute to local development post-project compared to baseline

Involvement in Circle of Learning contributed to building capacity among participating groups, with nearly all demonstrating evidence of developing new skills and knowledge.

The most common areas of progression highlighted in the before and after skills audit related to networking , organising local activities, dealing with issues of diversity and good relations, strategic planning, and working with local council and public bodies. Over 70% of the 11 groups for whom pre and post scores were available demonstrated progression in these areas.

Individual groups were seen, by themselves and their mentors, to have developed new skills and knowledge in a wide range of areas. Groups learned about good governance, roles and responsibilities, how to hold effective meetings, managing volunteers, applying for funding, and managing conflict.

Indicator: All groups able to identify examples of assistance and support provided by their hub organisation post-project

The support provided by mentors from the hub organisations was a key element of the project for participating groups. All groups completing reports identified examples of support and assistance received. For example, Londonderry Bands Forum, Skeoge Camerateurs, and Skeoge House Women's Group all highlighted advice received on policies and procedures, roles and responsibilities on committees and good governance. In Lisburn, Resurgam Youth and Lisburn SAFE were supported to review the structure of their groups, while the Welcome Project received guidance on volunteer management. The Lurgan Shared Education Programme and Belfast groups all highlighted assistance with planning activities and strategic direction, while Queen's Street Residents Association and the Lurgan Community Outreach Group were encouraged and supported to network more widely.

Indicator: Examples of changes in group practices and activities as a result of learning post-project

Most of the groups had already begun to take practical steps to implement learning from the programme in their everyday operation and activities. The Welcome Project in Lisburn had developed an induction process for their volunteers and, as a sign of appreciation for their efforts, had given volunteers branded jackets. Lisburn SAFE had also improved their volunteer management, delivering training plans for team leaders and updating their data collection procedures. The management committee of Resurgam Youth reviewed their structure, developing a number of sub-groups and recruited new members.

Londonderry Bands Forum, Skeoge Camerateurs, and Skeoge House Women's Group all updated their policies and procedures, with the women's group now having a staff handbook. Mornington Women's Group reviewed their strategic direction and rebranded the group to reflect their new outlook. They also introduced a new code of conduct to manage conflict within the group and prevent issues arising. Mornington, NB WISP, Recon, and Lurgan Community Outreach all described how they were now networking more as a result of their experience in Circle of Learning.

Indicator: % of groups who feel they have an influence when it comes to local decisions made in their neighbourhood post-project compared to baseline

At the outset of the project, 42.7% (n=44) of survey respondents felt that they could 'probably' or 'definitely' influence local decisions made in their neighbourhood. After taking part, 49.5% (n=51) indicated that they now felt they had more influence on local decisions.¹

Outcome: Participating groups are better connected and more open to networking and exchanging learning with others

Indicator: % of groups reporting new linkages developed with public bodies/local authorities and other communities/ organisations post-project

Over 60% (n=62) of survey respondents indicated that they had developed new linkages with other groups and communities during their involvement in the project. Most groups created new links/strengthened existing links with other members of their hub, with many also engaging with Co-operation Ireland for the first time.

Some groups developed links with the wider community through the programme, with, for example, Skeoge Women's Group developing relationships with the Foyle Women's and Skeoge Camerateurs linking with the Northside 50+ Club and St Brigid's College. While groups were less likely to develop links with public bodies/local authorities, Resurgam Youth were put in contact with Lisburn Castlereagh City Council's Social Enterprise Support Programme and Londonderry Bands Forum engaged with the Labour Relations Agency.

The opportunities for networking provided by Circle of Learning were particularly significant in Lurgan, with the programme creating safe spaces for conversations which would not otherwise have taken place. The programme facilitated people from different religious, political and social backgrounds to come together and share experiences of the conflict. This was seen as a significant step forward in Lurgan, given the deep divisions which exist within and between local communities.

Indicator: Groups able to identify examples of learning and good practice exchanged with other network members post-project

Groups exchanged a wide range of good practice and general learning during the project. In Lisburn, the Welcome Project and Lisburn SAFE learned from their partners about volunteer management, while Resurgam Youth learned about running a finance committee and the use of sub-groups to improve effectiveness of the organisation.

¹ The proportion of respondents feeling they could 'probably' or 'definitely' include local decisions increased to 52.4% (n=54).

Queen's Street Residents Association gained learning around organising events and holding effective meetings, while Lurgan Community Outreach Group gained awareness of new funding opportunities. Members of the Belfast hub exchanged information about their activities and OCNs which they had previously undertaken.

More generally, groups in Belfast and Lurgan reported new insights into issues and experiences in different communities. For example, NB WISP highlighted how they had gained new perspectives by learning about everyday issues and challenges faced by women in their partner communities.

Indicator: Groups identify new insights into benefits of networking and exchanging learning with others post-project

For some groups, the experience of taking part in Circle of Learning was very beneficial in raising awareness of the benefits of networking and exchanging learning with others. More recently established groups such as Queen's Street and Glenabbey Community Association were seen to be more open to networking and learning from others, while others including Recon, NB WISP and Mornington all reported more frequent engagement with other groups.

The Community Outreach Group had previously engaged in networking with a limited range of groups but came to recognise the importance of reaching out and engaging with others from different social backgrounds and experiences.

Indicator: % of participants who feel safer attending events in communities/ venues which they would not normally visit post-project compared to baseline

At the outset of the project, 54.4% (n=56) of survey respondents usually felt 'fairly comfortable' or 'very comfortable' attending events in areas they would not traditionally visit. Post-project, 71.8% (n=74) indicated that they now felt more comfortable about attending events in such areas.

Groups from Belfast and Derry/Londonderry were all seen to have moved outside their comfort zones by attending events in venues that would have been associated with different community backgrounds, including, for example, visiting Schomberg House.

4. Feedback from participants

Case Study 1: Lisburn Welcome Project

The Welcome Project in Lisburn was established in 2006 to support the integration of newcomers to Northern Ireland. The group provides information and advice, delivers training, and organises cultural and social events to celebrate and raise awareness of cultural diversity. While the group has managed to engage some volunteers from local migrant communities in the area, this had tended to be on a one-off basis. With support from Circle of Learning, they wanted to promote the benefits of volunteering among local BME communities and highlight the benefits, with a view to developing a cohort of regular volunteers.

As part of their action plan, the Welcome Project organised an awareness-raising session on the benefits of volunteering and arranged for five volunteers to undertake an intensive ESOL course at South Eastern College. Volunteers were also presented with branded jackets to recognise their efforts and encourage ongoing commitment. The activities were seen to have been successful in encouraging regular involvement, with participants seen to be more aware of the value of volunteering and increasing their commitment. All 12 people who took part in the training will assist in organising an upcoming event to mark International Children's Day, with two joining the management committee and one providing voluntary admin support.

Case Study 2: Glenabbey Community Association

Glenabbey is a relatively new housing estate in the Shantallow area of Derry/Londonderry. The estate has little social infrastructure in place and faced challenges of building a new community and addressing emerging problems of youth anti-social behaviour. The Community Association was formed in 2016 to build capacity and strengthen relations in the estate but members had little experience of community involvement. Through Circle of Learning, they received mentoring support from Leafair Community Association who shared their knowledge and expertise of community organising. The group learned to operate more effectively and were supported to adopt a more formal structure. With funding from Circle of Learning, the group worked with local partners to organise a fun day on the estate which helped to bring the community together and build relationships. The group were also supported to have a more visible presence in the area, producing regular newsletter, creating a Facebook page, and networking more widely.

Case Study 3: Mornington Women's Group

Mornington Women's Group was set up in 2007 to provide support and development opportunities to women from different community backgrounds, many of whom were directly impacted by the conflict, and to help build good relations. While the group had been involved in many programmes over the years, it lacked governance skills and strategic direction. The group also faced challenges around communication and dealing with conflict.

Funding support from Circle of Learning enabled the group to hold a strategic planning day in Farset which helped set a new direction for the group and address unresolved conflicts. The group have now rebranded themselves and have an action place in place for the next nine months, as well a code of conduct for members.

5. Key Findings and Conclusions

The 2016/17 Circle of Learning Programme successfully contributed to the building of capacity among marginalised communities across Northern Ireland. Participating groups highlighted a wide range of supports and assistance provided by their mentors and were also supported to access training and development opportunities. Examples of skills and learning gained during the project included good governance, holding effective meetings, managing volunteers, applying for funding, and handling conflict. Most groups were able to identify specific changes which they had made to implement their learning.

Circle of Learning also successfully helped groups to network and exchange learning with groups from diverse backgrounds, both locally and across the region. Groups were also supported to develop links outside the Circle of Learning network in their wider communities. The opportunities for engagement and discussion provided by the project also contributed to addressing good relations issues and conflict legacies, creating safe spaces for new links and conversations in some areas and enabling people to attend events in areas and communities they would not previously have visited.

The introduction of the hub structure proved a very significant addition to the project, with groups greatly valuing the dedicated mentoring support which they received from more experienced community organisations in their area. For Co-operation Ireland, the new structure broadened the reach of Circle of Learning by providing access to new groups within the hub's existing networks. The flexibility of funding available for the local action plans under the project was also a significant strength, ensuring that activities were responsive to group needs and complemented other funding streams. In Belfast, in particular, Circle of Learning funding enabled ICR to integrate and enhance other streams of work they were delivering with their hub groups under the City Council's *Back to the Future* programme.

While the structure adopted in 2016/2017 has proved very successful, we would like to develop the model further by deepening collaboration between network members. In particular, we intend to explore how we can support groups to progress beyond initial networking and site visits to undertaking more in-depth practical co-operation.



Survey Questions- SUMMARY OF ACTIVITY QUESTIONNAIRES

Programme- Participants

All groups should ask questions 1-4 and chose the most relevant of the other questions depending of the type of programme and its intended outcomes

1. What age are you

11-17 **8**

18-25 **6**

26-45 **41**

46-65 **35**

65+ **13**

2. What do you do? – tick any that apply to you.

In school **8**

In alternative education **3**

In further or higher education **3**

In training **1**

In full time work **17**

In part-time work **20**

Unemployed **33**

Other **18** – please specify _____

Other responses included retired, volunteer, and carer

3. What cross community contact have you had in the last year?

	No.
None	10
A little	32
Some	29
A lot	32
TOTAL	103

4. What is your community background?

	No.
Protestant background	291
Catholic background	277
Other background	0
Total	568

Survey Questions

5. How comfortable do you usually feel attending an event in areas you would not traditionally visit?

	Baseline	End of Project
Very uncomfortable	8	3
Fairly uncomfortable	5	9
Neither	29	11
Fairly comfortable	39	41
Very comfortable	17	35
Don't Know	4	2
TOTAL	102	101

After taking part in Circle of Learning, would you say you feel:

	No.
More comfortable	74
Less comfortable	3
Same	24
TOTAL	101

6. Thinking about your neighbourhood, the kind of place it is and the kind of people who live there, do you feel that you have any influence when it comes to local decisions made in your area?

	Baseline	End of Project
Definitely not	11	10
Probably not	41	28
Yes, probably	35	34
Yes, definitely	9	20
Don't know	6	5
TOTAL	102	97

After taking part in Circle of Learning, would you say you feel you have:

	No.
More influence	51
Less influence	1
Same	43
TOTAL	95

7. Do you currently have linkages developed with public bodies/local authorities and other communities/organisations?

	Baseline	End of Project
Definitely not	6	8
Probably not	21	15
Yes, probably	45	39
Yes, definitely	24	29
Don't know	4	6
TOTAL	100	97

At the end of the programme, would you say you felt you had:

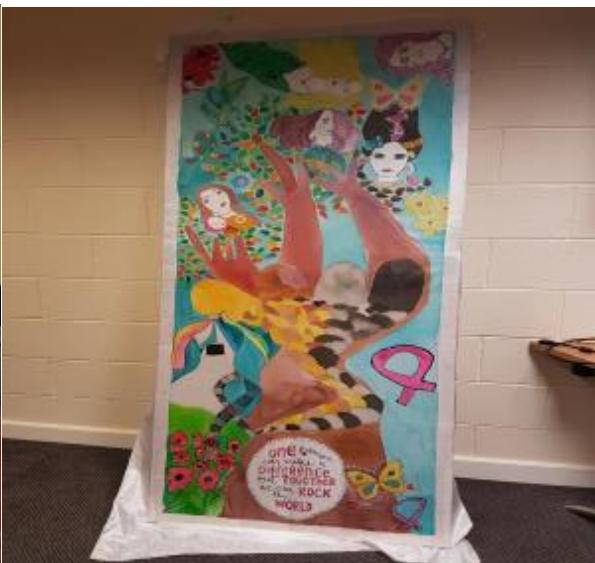
	No.
More linkages	62
Less linkages	2
Same	33
TOTAL	97

Annex B**Example Attendance Register (Programme)**

Date	Event	Attendance
January 12 th , 2017	Networking event, Museum of Orange Heritage	40
March 23-24 th , 2017	Circle of Learning Residential, Holiday Inn, Belfast	35
March 30 th , 2017	Final Conference, The Homeplace, Bellaghy	48

Approx. 40 meetings held between 4 hubs, smaller groups and hub leaders, with an average attendance of 8 participants per meeting.

Pictures of Events



**CENTRAL GOOD RELATIONS FUNDING 2016/17
FINAL PROGRESS REPORT CHECKLIST****Group Name: Community and Voluntary Group****Have the activity outputs been delivered?**

Activity	Target	Achieved	Rationale
Creation of support hubs to link host organisations with low capacity groups in each area	4 hubs created, linking host organisations with 4 low capacity groups in each area	Fully achieved – 4 hubs (ICR, Leafair, Jethro and Resurgam Trust) linked with 4 local groups in each area	
Groups receive professional mentoring support	16 groups received professional mentoring support	Fully achieved – 16 groups received ongoing mentoring and support from their hub organisation	
Production of local action plans	16 local action plans produced	Fully achieved – 16 groups prepared and delivered an action plan	
Hosting of networking meetings by local groups	16 networking meetings hosted by local groups	Fully achieved – approx. 40 meetings held across the four hubs	

Have attendance targets been met? Please detail:

Target	Met - detail	Rationale
Appointment of 4 hub organisations	4 hubs appointed – ICR, Leafair, Jethro Centre, Resurgam Trust	
Recruitment of 16 groups, 4 per hub	16 groups recruited (see Section 1) Average attendance of 8 at networking meetings	

Have Outcomes been achieved? Please detail:

Outcome	Met – detail	Stats
Groups feel better able to influence local decisions made in their neighbourhood	Almost half of survey respondents indicated that they felt better able to influence local decisions made in their neighbourhood after taking part in the project	49.5% (n=51) of survey respondents indicated that they felt they had more influence on local decisions after taking part in the project
Participants feel safer attending events in venues associated with the other community	A large majority of survey respondents indicated that they felt more comfortable attending events in communities/venues they would not normally visit after taking part in the project	71.8% (n=74) of survey respondents indicated that they felt more comfortable attending events in communities/venues they would not normally visit after taking part in the project
Participating groups are better connected, with new linkages developed with public bodies and other communities	Over three-fifths of survey respondents indicated that they had developed new linkages with other groups and communities during the project	60.2% (n=62) of survey respondents indicated that they had developed new linkages with other groups and communities during the project

Please provide any additional comments:

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Summary of outcomes achieved

Feedback from participating groups provided good evidence for achievement of the following outcomes:

Participating groups were better equipped to deliver their activities and contribute to local development, with improved skills and knowledge – most groups were able to identify changes in their practices as a result of learning gained from their mentors and from other network members

All participating groups were better connected, with new linkages developed, and there was evidence of some less-experienced groups becoming more open to networking as they began to recognise the benefits of engaging and exchanging learning with others

Activities delivered through Circle of Learning contributed to local development and the building of good relations in the participating areas, including, for example, helping to integrate migrant communities, improving community cohesion in a new housing estate, and creating spaces for new conversations across local community divisions

Signed:	Dated:
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