

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast – Prevention: Delivering Services Through TANF  
TRANSCRIPT

Presenters: Female Narrator; Tom Oates, Child Welfare Information Gateway; Lawrence Piper, Oregon Department of Human Services; Lidwinner Machado, Oregon Department of Human Services; Dianna Ilaoa, Oregon Department of Human Services; Lolly Solistorres, Oregon Department of Human Services

00:00:00 [Music Introduction]

**FEMALE NARRATOR** [00:00:03]: This is the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast, a place for those who care about strengthening families and protecting children. You'll hear about the innovations, emerging trends and success stories across child welfare direct from those striving to make a difference. This is your place for new ideas and information to support your work to improve the lives of children, youth, and families.

**TOM OATES** [00:00:32]: Welcome in to the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast, everyone. Tom Oates here with you again, and we're continuing to talk about how states and local communities are delivering prevention services. You know, about ten years ago, the State of Oregon saw that nearly half of its families who were involved in the Child Welfare System were also connected to TANF Services. And they also saw an opportunity: offering community-based prevention services to TANF families to hopefully decrease the risk of becoming involved in the Child Welfare System.

[00:01:03]: So today, we're gonna take a dive into what that looks like from the state-level and on the ground as Self-Sufficiency, Child Welfare and Support Services come together to connect families to housing, transportation, parenting skills or education support. It's called Family Support and Connections and it's run through about 75 different program offices throughout the state. Now, it's funded mostly through a community-based child abuse and prevention grant, but they blend other funds together to make it happen. What it looks like to the families is a partnership between family coaches - who help administer TANF - and family advocates - who help connect families to services and supports.

[00:01:44]: Together they work with families in the hopes of increasing Protective Factors, stabilizing the family for the long term - and you'll hear about one of their success stories. And all of this hopes to reduce the risk of a family getting involved with the Child Welfare System.

[00:01:58]: So, joining us in on the conversation are Lawrence Piper from the Oregon Department of Human Services, who administers the program from the state level, along with three folks from Umatilla and Morrow counties - Dianna Ilaoa, a Self-Sufficiency Program Manager, Liddy Machado, a Child Welfare Program Manager and Lolly Torres, a community resource coordinator.

[00:02:21]: You'll hear what the state does to support the program, but also the steps in identifying and working with families in this collaborative working arrangement - along with the approach professionals have to take in truly partnering with families. This points to understanding that abuse and neglect are symptoms of an array of potential root causes. Identifying and addressing those causes can help keep families stable and children safe. So, here we go. Talking family support and connections from Oregon.

[00:02:54]: So, folks, I wanna welcome you in to the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast and, Lawrence, let's start with you from the state perspective - so talk to me why TANF families are, were the group that Family Support and Connections decided to focus on.

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**LAWRENCE PIPER** [00:03:10]: Thank you, Tom, I appreciate the opportunity. I came in shortly after the, the focus groups met and talked about how can we effectively use this part of federal funding and it became very obvious that we already had an access point for families who were experiencing extreme levels of stress - operating in crisis mode from, not only house to house, but sometimes meal to meal - and recognize that this population was in a risk category, not necessarily purposely, but that the opportunity to intervene and provide additional supports for their stability was very appropriate within the systems that are already here, it was a perfect opportunity to provide additional services looking at family stability.

**TOM OATES** [00:04:23]: You know and you also have the structure of this, this network of all your, you know, nearly 75 program offices throughout the state, so, from the central office, from the state perspective what is Family Support and Connections, the main office within the state doing to support all those program offices?

**LAWRENCE PIPER** [00:04:40]: So, initially the, the contracts were written as almost an instruction manual, looking at the federal criteria and looking at building on the positives and looking at the Protective Factors we, we knew that the more you enhance Protective Factors, the more you minimize risks. There are risks that you can't mediate, it's a circumstance of life and but there's a way to mediate those circumstances and that's by developing the Protective Factors - and so that was the framework that was put not only just by instruction, but contractually, these are the types of programs and the focus we want you at the local level to work with.

[00:05:35]: We provide continuous program technical assistance, clear guidance and direction for program design and implementation, developed a process for invoicing and fairly quick turnaround from the invoice to payment being received. Most of our providers are smaller private non-profits, particularly in our rural areas and they don't, they, we don't want to set up a cash flow issue. Advocate for appropriate referrals - we can make referrals that need to be appropriate for the services provided to make sure that's a good match. Access to training and support in partial scholarships for those contracted agencies, staff to understand what the whole state system - the TANF, SNAP, childcare, Child Welfare - understanding all of those so they know that what they're doing is significantly making a difference, and exactly where. And also in looking at equitable allocations of the funding across the state.

**TOM OATES** [00:06:52]: I'm curious, is there a way that the state is supporting the communication between the program offices? So, maybe what's happening in one part of the state, somebody else can learn, or if you've got different parts of the state that say, hey I've got an idea or I've got a need that you can kind of help partner, you know, along the way - just as a, just as the local program offices, you know, collaborate within their own community, the state is your community.

**LAWRENCE PIPER** [00:07:18]: Yes, there are, there is a steering committee made up primarily representative of the state and their program managers, they are staff people within self-sufficiency programs. I serve on several work groups that include Child Welfare - we have a family stability work group that has Child Welfare people from the field, as well as - the field offices - as well as contracted providers and so there's a constant communication and channeling.

[00:07:58]: I do a fair amount of that, I'm on several national listservs and I always forward all that information and do a lot of the connecting people to people, as well as Child Welfare systems and publications from the FRIENDS network, which is our TA provider.

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**TOM OATES** [00:08:25]: So, besides - and clearly you guys are a CBCAP grantees, which, you know, FRIENDS clearly has as their involvement and that's where their support comes from - but, what's the overall state investment here for Family Support and Connections, I mean are TANF funds used here, or how's that happen?

**LAWRENCE PIPER** [00:08:43]: Yes, so, we have blended multiple sources of funding, the CBCAP is the foundation and the criteria for program implementation and design. The governor has a line item in her budget that is actually approximately 30% of the total pot and then on top of that, we've invested 1.6 million TANF service dollars to, to really ensure that there's equitable services across the state - rather than just a pilot in the most populous area - that the most populous areas sometimes have the resources where rural and frontier communities - which we have a lot of in Oregon - are left behind and that wasn't acceptable in our thinking when we designed the program.

**TOM OATES** [00:09:43]: Especially because those areas may have different challenges - where an urban area you have to deal with volume, but maybe in a rural area you have to deal with transportation or just finding where the services are.

**LAWRENCE PIPER** [00:09:55]: Absolutely.

**TOM OATES** [00:09:56]: So, let's talk about some of that inaction, and so I want to bring in, you know, Liddy, Dianna and Lolly, just, you know, to remind folks, Liddy comes at it from the Child Welfare angle, Dianna through the self-sufficiency angle with TANF, and Lolly Torres in dealing with all of those community partners and trying to work with those family coaches. And so, let me start with asking about the process - from identifying families to that partnership between self-sufficiency and Family Support Connections - Dianna, what does that process look like, kind of from start to finish when you're dealing with a family?

**DIANNA ILAOA** [00:10:53]: Okay, I'm gonna go ahead and break that into the three parts that you mentioned, it might make it easier to, kind of, outline that. I'm gonna start with the identifying of families. With self-sufficiency, last year we had begun using a self-assessment tool with individuals that really helped to identify their areas of strength and areas that may have needed some additional support to gain skills and long-term stability.

[00:11:03]: This really was putting our families back in the driver's seat. Many of these times, when we're doing the assessment is where we get to introduce Family Support and Connections and offer to connect them with the program. Another way that we are identifying families is through the collaboration efforts of self-sufficiency and Child Welfare. It could be through a case that didn't necessarily rise to the Child Welfare level, but we did identify that we could benefit from the Family Support and Connections Program.

[00:11:37]: At this point if that is identified, the family coach would offer the services and submit a referral if the client agreed to enter into services with FSC. So, really, you know, there's many ways that families are identified through our systems and it really can happen at any point while we're working with them.

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[00:11:57]: Sometimes, initially up front, families aren't ready for that and because we are creating a plan together and they really are the driver of their plans and goals, we try to enter that system with them at the point that they're ready because -

**TOM OATES** [00:12:14]: Yeah -

**DIANNA ILAOA** [00:12:16]: - because we get the best impact and engagement at those times.

**TOM OATES** [00:12:19]: You know, I was curious about when someone's services are offered, how often are families agreeing or taking you up on the offer for services?

**DIANNA ILAOA** [00:12:28]: I don't have an actual number for you, but there is a fairly large percentage. If there are areas that they identify - families usually, you know, like I said they're setting those goals for themselves and they're motivated to remove those barriers or obstacles, so a lot of times they're able to - they will engage.

**TOM OATES** [00:12:49]: So, you mentioned identifying families, talk to me about, you know, partnership between FSS and Family Support and Connections and then providing services - the other two steps of that three-step process.

**DIANNA ILAOA** [00:13:00]: Right, yes, our partnerships, you know, one of the things about this is that we were, we specifically contract for services in the community so that it's really represented and as we talk about, you know, we are in a rural area and I think even some of our area could be considered frontier. So, based on that, it's really important that we contract for the services in the community.

[00:13:24]: The beauty of the contract is that we really are getting more than what we contract for because of the partnering that we do. Self-sufficiency and Child Welfare are housed under the same umbrella, where Family Support and Connections, the Head Start and the Oregon Parent Education Collaborative are also housed under the same umbrella. So, having many of the same goals provides a unique opportunity in our district. It's allowing us to braid our services and leverage resources to help families.

[00:13:55]: We also feel very fortunate because we're able to share best practices and use each other's expertise. I'd like to move on to the services part from there, if that's okay. The services that we're providing vary based on the individual family needs. We always want to look at the family holistically and that really is that shift of looking at the family and using the assessment and also an important component in that is that we're using an equity lens. This is not so much about equitable but actual equity, because not everybody needs the same thing. No one size fits all, if you will.

[00:14:35]: Another piece, example that I like to share is that some of the services - you know, just how they range - some of it is around stabilization and, again, this is long-term sustaining; parenting skills, social connections, family bonding, some of the other services that they're providing is around housing, budgeting. It's really, some of those things are seen maybe basic to some of us, but some people have never experienced that, nor has it ever been modeled to them. And many times, when a family maybe gets into a home from being homeless, you know, they used to spend their money in a different way and now they're needing to be taught in a different way to be able to sustain that housing. So, that's a really big piece of it.

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[00:15:27]: The other couple of just quick examples are navigating resources and other systems. And so, you know, I know our system very well, so I have no problem navigating it, but if I had to go to, maybe let's say the Social Security office, I'm not, I have a basic understanding, but I'm not very familiar with that system. And, sometimes it can be very, very overwhelming for individuals and we kind of throw our hands up in the air and give up and so, this is where those connections with Family Support and Connections really, really helps families walk through it side by side and just really giving them what they need. Just two of the other things that are really big on our list there is around transportation and choosing really good childcare that works for the children.

**TOM OATES** [00:16:15]: That's great, that's great. So, you've got this, obviously a community collaboration when you're trying to deal with all of your partners and all of the service providers, but then there's a collaboration from the agencies themselves, and so, Lolly, when it comes to the, the family coaches and those community partners and the family advocates, how is everybody working together to, you know, to share information and to make sure there are no gaps along, along the line?

**LOLLY TORRES** [00:16:41]: So, we have a strong structural foundation that allows us to collaborate together because self-sufficiency and Child Welfare are under the same umbrella, the Family Support and Connections is contracted by us. So, in our district - which is district twelve, Umatilla and Morrow county - so, the family advocates had a great working relationship, collaboration, and are able to walk into the self-sufficiency office to stop the family at any time the family coach is available.

[00:17:08]: Also, it is through the regular monthly staffings at the self-sufficiency office that the family advocates share information and conversations between family advocates and families. Throughout this we also have informal staffing by phone calls, emails that also go back and forth throughout the month to share the information. And then also through discussion with the family coaches and the advocates, they consider themselves a part of the self-sufficiency team. The advocates feel valued and appreciated by family coaches in the work they do and it makes for great teamwork.

**TOM OATES** [00:17:46]: Well, and you need a specific type of, of talent with the skills and, and frankly, the mindset to have a strong family advocate. And, so, so, Liddy, you know, you, you manage more than 60 people, so you've gotta deal with personalities and folks and all the work that goes into their day to day, when you are looking for a family advocate, talk to me about what makes a family advocate successful for your program.

**LIDWINNER MACHADO** [00:18:10]: Yes, thank you so much. They have to be really empathetic and non-judgmental, they have to be persistent but patient, sometimes it takes a while for families to respond and engage in services. They have, you know, they have to help families identify strengths and build on those strengths. They need to have the knowledge of community resources to help families navigate the systems and also help make referrals to community resources. It is important to meet families where they are and taking into consideration the family history, how the parents grew up and employing former - employing trauma informed practice strategies.

[00:18:52]: The goal for family advocates is to help families become stable and self-sufficient and helping parents overcome barriers and figuring a way to move forward. They need to have strong family engagement skills, along with active listening to build rapport. Cross collaboration is what Lolly mentioned between the self-sufficiency family coaches and family advocates is a must and regular staffings needs to occur to reach the best outcome for families.

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[00:19:22]: And, in our district, you know, like Lolly already mentioned, they conduct our monthly staffings and also they meet as frequently as, as how the families need.

**TOM OATES** [00:19:38]: So, with that, there's you know, clearly the family plays a role, the family is a part of this. So, where is that handoff between control, between responsibility, because it's, it's we've changed, you know, within the Child Welfare System, we are changing to letting the family have a leadership role and an ownership role in their own plans. Has there been a shift over the past number of years to make sure that really what family centered means is they are involved in the process along the way, as opposed to, kind of, being led by the professionals? How is, how are your family advocates embracing that?

**LIDWINNER MACHADO** [00:20:22]: Most of the time they want to be in and out of that family's life as quickly as possible in the shortest amount possible so that families can move on with their lives. And, you know, it's, it's meeting that family where they are, like I already mentioned, that you know, they get into the home, they identify what is, what it is that the family needs, the family is driving this and their role is to help that family move that agenda forward, whatever that agenda is - whether it's looking for a job, whether it's getting into open drug treatment, whether it's looking for other services for their family - that's exactly what they're working on.

**TOM OATES** [00:21:01]: So, what's the biggest challenge that your family advocates face?

**LIDWINNER MACHADO** [00:21:05]: Yes, as you know, the Family Support and Connections Program is voluntary, so sometimes families choose to opt out of the program at any time and, you know, there's nothing, you know, the family advocates can do if families choose to opt out. At times, it's really hard for families to stay long within the program in order to really see the benefits of the program and sometimes it's really hard to connect with homeless families because they are always moving from one place to the other.

[00:21:37]: And, given that we are in rural communities, there's, there's not a wide array of services to refer our families to and during the times that, you know, the families are working with the family advocates, they'll provide transportation, they'll, you know, provide taxi tickets or taxi vouchers, they will sometimes give them a ride - however, the goal is for those families to figure this out on their own so that they will become self-sufficient and the lack of public transportation in our area is a huge barrier to the family continuing with attending services.

[00:22:22]: I also wanna men- oh, sorry - I also wanna mention that, you know, sometimes if we have, if they have parents who have felony charges on their records, it is so hard for them to get jobs and get housing, which makes it difficult for family advocates to help them overcome some of these barriers. And funding also is limited, so sometimes it's really hard for the participants to meet their goals and outcomes because of the lack of funding.

**TOM OATES** [00:22:55]: Yeah. That's a case across the board when we're trying to deal with just the basic nature of where you are and the struggles that families have. And, you guys are all pointing on something about, you know, especially when the program is designed to prevent - that's what we're talking about - prevention of entering in the Child Welfare System. And knowing then there are so many different factors that can come into play. You guys have mentioned - is, is it substance use, is it housing, is it employment, is it training, is, is it parenting skills. And those are all different, but yet they all look at the family holistically - 'cause it's not always one, it could be a combination of factors.

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[00:23:36]: You know, Dianna, talk to me about this shift of looking at the family holistically and less addressing, you know, the symptoms and now more the root cause.

**DIANNA ILAOA** [00:23:46]: Yes, our agency as a program had to really redefine what success looks like for families. This has shifted our thinking in terms of our approach with the families. Especially knowing that families know what's best for them and they really are the experts in their own lives. So, with all of that said, this is really, again, helping to put families in the driver's seat of their lives and taking ownership of their goals.

[00:24:16]: And we talked about the preventative keys of this work, but we're also working on really helping to stabilize families long term and out of poverty. I think, you know, in years past, a lot of the work was around crisis driven and we're really trying to be up in front of that and be really proactive because we really do want to help families with that pathway out of poverty so that it can be sustained long term and it would be a systemic type system for them.

[00:24:51]: One of the things that really has kind of helped with that, as I mentioned before, was the assessment tool that we're using. That really has helped us to truly get the root causes versus symptoms. For example, housing. We've seen folks get housing, but the problem is that they're not able to sustain it and a lot of times, you know, they're, they're back to us trying to look for answers for that. With the old approach that we used, you know, again people would lose their housing and then they would come back starting at ground zero to find new housing only to sometimes repeat that same situation many times over.

[00:25:32]: In the new approach that we're using, right up front we're exploring the factors that contributed to the loss of the housing and we'll work on addressing those issues. This allows the families to remove those barriers and sustain long term housing. Again, once we can secure housing, this just brings the family one step closer to their pathway out of poverty. I can say the same thing about employment. You know, we had a really big push in the years past to really get people to work and people would get jobs, but they weren't able to keep them. And there was many reasons why - childcare, transportation, you know, they weren't really conditioned for what the workforce would look like - and then they would end up back on services.

[00:26:17]: So, this time around, we really looked at what would that look like if you got a job. What support systems do you have in place, what skills do you have to address the needs that might arise and where can we provide additional skill sets, what are some things that we can do beyond you getting that employment to really help you out of poverty. We know many of our folks if they out the gate end up in a, you know, a minimum wage job, that's not the solution for them long term, that's the starting point and then how do we build on that. And that's the kind of work that we're doing with families to help them, again, not be the crisis driven mode that we had in the past, but really that longevity of being really able to stabilize in and move forward with their lives and be free of having to use our type of services - basically working ourselves out of a job, if you will.

**TOM OATES** [00:27:12]: Yeah, well I mean it shifts away from being a plan of reaction to a plan of strategic forward looking, and it goes really back to providing in home services before Child Welfare needs to be involved, because, you know, when we use the phrase abuse and neglect, a lot of times it's not abuse and neglect that we're dealing with, it's the root causes that could happen decades, years,

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months, potentially days beforehand and so, if you can stabilize the family, you also set them up on a better path of, of long term success.

[00:27:48]: But, you guys are in a, you know, a, a more rural part of the state, and so, Lolly, you are dealing with the community partners and so, where does that involvement happen when you may have a lack of services, or a lack of resources within the county - talk to me about what you're doing to establish and sustain those community partners.

**LOLLY TORRES** [00:28:11]: Actually one of the things that I enjoy doing is really partnering with communities and also figuring out working, figuring out what they need for the family is first of all. So, say that they're needing IDs, what community partners can provide that, and we also, also have a program where we can also help with that, so, if there's clothing, school clothing, what community partners can help with that and we look at various partnerships and school supplies - schools supplies is one of the things that we really run into that families are having a struggle to provide for that and there's the, the churches, the religion institutions that do help out with that. We also partner with the CTUIR, which is the tribal, yea, and they also have programs that do help out families. So, it's really meeting the partners where they're at and actually asking what resources they have available.

**TOM OATES** [00:29:31]: A lot of that sounds just like, not only locating those resources and services, but also making them aware of the need and, you use the phrase hey any part will help because it's gonna go toward a family in need and, and, and your job is so crucial of connecting those families to those services. And, so, we're, we're talking about this new approach and, and clearly stabilizing families is not a new goal, but the approach that has changed and so, Lawrence, let me bring you back in and talk about hey, what are the numbers telling you after, you know, you've been at this for a bit of time, what kind of progress can you talk about?

**LAWRENCE PIPER** [00:30:08]: Thank you, Tom. The, the numbers that initially drove us to this population was the percentage of active Child Welfare services the, the families that were connected were approximately 46-48% of Child Welfare cases had been on TANF or SNAP services prior. We are at approximately nine years later, it's not a, it's not a short term, but approximately nine years later, currently 32% of open Child Welfare cases had been on other state services prior, so, so, the reduction at that bottom line end has shown progress in our approaches and the work that you've been hearing about today.

**TOM OATES** [00:31:15]: So, in, in less than a decade, you're talking about from nearly half to one third and so, there's, there's a difference right there. So, Lolly, based on those numbers that Lawrence just said, give me a story, what does that, what does that look like, really, when we talk about the reductions, what does success look like in Oregon?

**LOLLY TORRES** [00:31:37]: Like it was mentioned before, this program is voluntary and for families when they are identified, there is, I have some examples, there is one that the family need was childcare, parenting, hygiene, family management - so they did get engaged with Family Support and Connections and the successful outcome to this was they started a parenting class, they were working on maintaining their house kept clean and then eating healthier. To me, that is a really success story.

**TOM OATES** [00:32:11]: And, and explain this to me about how long you guys are still involved with the family, because just when services are provide don day one, it doesn't necessarily mean you walk out the door at that point.

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**LOLLY TORRES** [00:32:21]: Correct. In reality, the family coach and Family Support and Connections they do staff these cases. Once they have met the referral outcome, then they get referred back to the family coaches and the family coaches continue working with these families, because it's not just one barrier ends and then there's no other ones. There's other issues that do come along and if they wanna increase their, their skills or enhance their skills for employment, then that's another, that's another step or goal that the family is willing to take.

**TOM OATES** [00:32:55]: Yeah, self-sufficiency also means self-sustainability along the way and so being there to at least make sure that sustainability is gonna happen, while the family advocates may step out, the family coaches are always there as a support system and to make sure that the family can keep that momentum, that sustainability.

**LOLLY TORRES** [00:33:15]: Yes, correct.

**TOM OATES** [00:33:16]: Dianna, and, and Liddy and Lolly, along with Lawrence, guys, again I appreciate the work you're doing, I appreciate you taking the time and sharing your story with what you guys are doing in Oregon with us here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast. Folks, thank you guys so much.

**All:** [00:33:31]: Thank you very much, thank you for having us!

**TOM OATES** [00:33:35]: You know, we recently posted another prevention related episode featuring work across Pennsylvania, where the state operates community-based prevention support similar to what Oregon is doing, but they operate it through their Office of Child Development and Early Learning, basically providing the same system of support recognizing that each family has different challenges and helping meet those specific root causes can go a long way to reducing risks and setting up families to sustain that stability over the long term.

[00:34:05]: So, if you go to this podcast's web page at [acf.hhs.gov/cb](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb), just search 'podcasts', we'll have all of our prevention related episodes for you. We'll also point you to some resources specifically about practice improvement, focusing on the connection and collaboration with TANF. So, if you're wondering about the community-based prevention work in your state, we'll also put a link to the FRIENDS National Resource Center's homepage, so you can search your state for the community-based child abuse prevention grantees in your backyard.

[00:34:35]: And, there's also good stuff we'll put up there for, from the Self-Sufficiency Resource Clearinghouse. So, this is the fourth in the series of episodes we've out together featuring specific examples of improving community-based prevention - each coming at the topic from slightly different angles, community training programs, contract revisioning to correctly align services, and how states organize their networks of prevention services.

[00:35:01]: So, my thanks to Lawrence Piper, Liddy Machado, Dianna Ilaoa and Lolly Torres for their time and energy and as always, my thanks to you for the valuable time you've chosen to spend listening to the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast.

**FEMALE NARRATOR** [00:35:18]: Thanks for joining us for this edition of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. Child Welfare Information Gateway is available at [childwelfare.gov](https://www.childwelfare.gov) and is a service of

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