



HOUSING MATTERS

Advice • Support • Advocacy



Impact Report

2023-2024

A note from our Director

A year into our new identity as Housing Matters, it's with great pleasure I introduce our Impact Report for 2023/24. Over the year, as the housing crisis continued to sweep across Bristol, our **resilience and agility** were critical in meeting the changing needs of local communities. Through the challenges, we grew in strength, using our knowledge and expertise to develop new initiatives to **prevent homelessness** – now and into the future.

A highlight of the year has been the establishment of the Housing Matters Advisory Board. Its members are those who have lived experience of housing insecurity or homelessness. They input their invaluable insight into shaping our service – we know that listening to and **elevating the voices of local communities** is key to ensuring long-term, meaningful impact.

Collaboration continues to be at the heart of our approach: by working with others we can achieve more for our clients than we can alone. We're proud to have strengthened the Housing Roundtable last year, which has become a key forum for housing/homelessness organisations and local council leaders to share learning and pilot new ideas in response to Bristol's housing crisis.

The road to ending homelessness is complex and there's no quick fix. As the rising demand for our service shows no sign of slowing, we're proud to have been able to continue our **trainee scheme for new Housing Advisers**. Investing in our team remains our top priority; they are our biggest asset and their ongoing dedication to people in housing crisis underpins every achievement in this report.

We'll continue to provide the advice, support, and advocacy needed until everyone around Bristol has a safe, secure and suitable place they're happy to call home.



Alice Tibbert
Director



What we do

1. Brief Advice

Clients can chat with one of our expert advisers who may be able to resolve their issues quickly or provide them with the support to do this themselves.

2. Casework

For more complex issues, we offer 1:1 advice and support for as long as needed - over several months or even years, often acting on the client's behalf.

3. Outreach

Working in partnership with trusted community hubs across Bristol, we bring our service to marginalised communities, removing barriers to access.

4. Influencing

We drive change within the systems that entrench inequality and ensure the voices of local people are amplified at city-wide debates and policy making forums.

Established in 1965, Housing Matters provides free, independent, and specialist **advice, support, and advocacy** to people facing housing crisis and homelessness around Bristol. We aim to find unique, **long-term solutions** for our clients, whatever their needs.

Our values



People-first



Informed



Dedicated



Inclusive

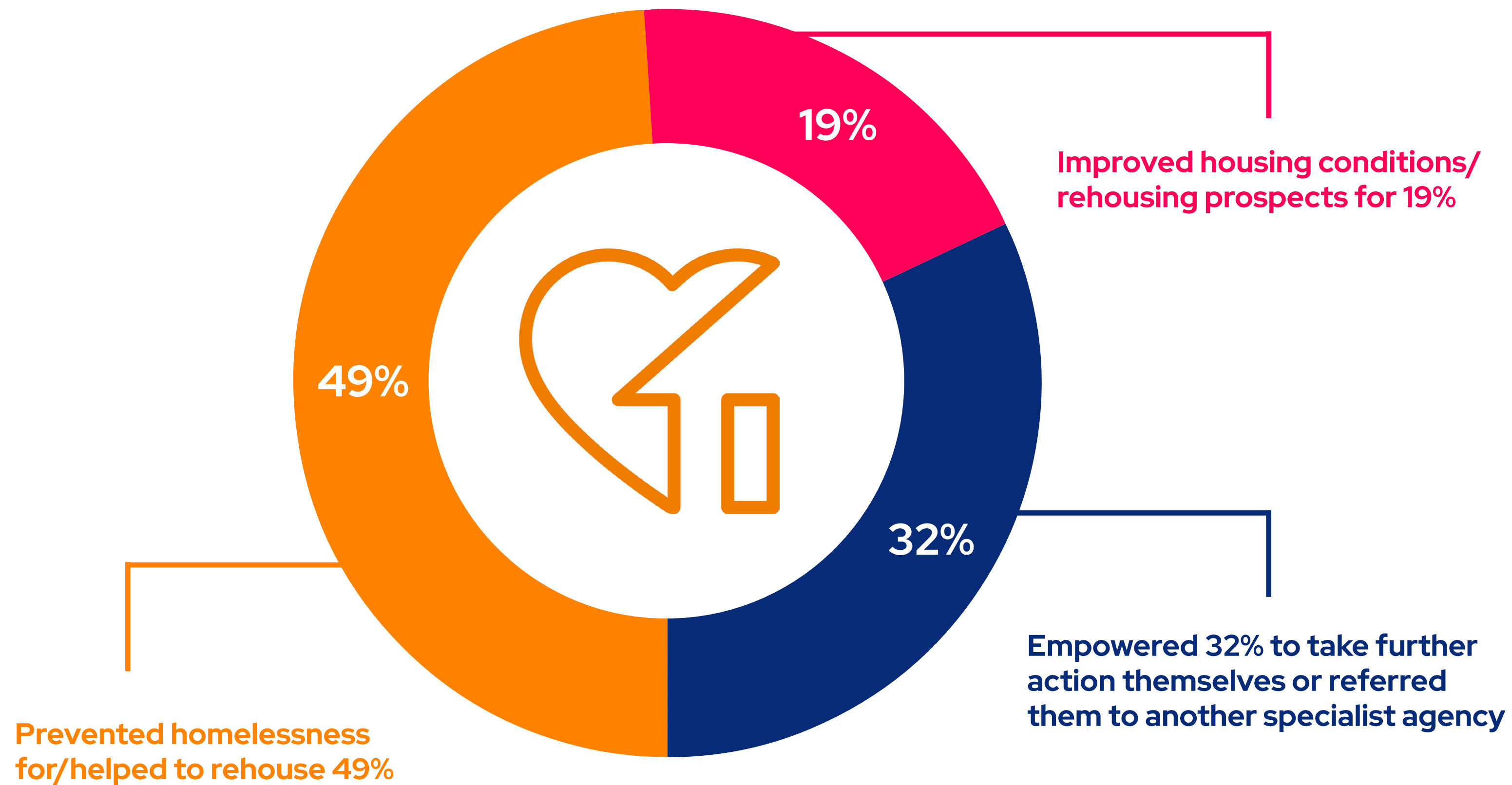


Resourceful



Our impact - highlights

Lots of people needed our long-term support because they were threatened with homelessness – or already experiencing it. For these clients, we...



...Its having that support that is so important and has made me feel stronger. It has got me through the worst. I am so grateful.

our client



£160,000+

Overall, we helped clients access £160,000+ in additional income e.g., benefits, charity grants, and lodger income.

Bristol's housing crisis

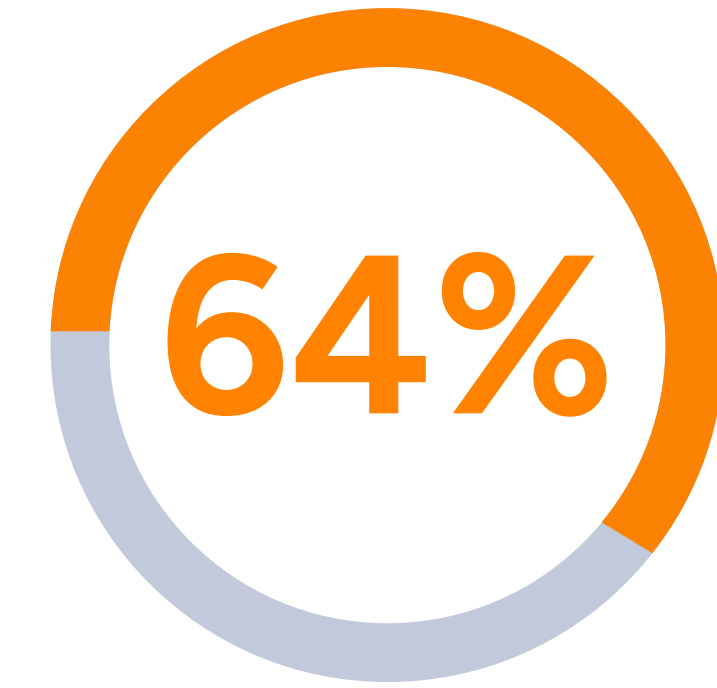
On any given night in Bristol, at least 70 people are bedding down on the city's streets. Yet, unfortunately, rough sleeping is only the tip of Bristol's housing crisis.

- The city has become the **most expensive** place to rent outside of London.
- The number of households in temporary accommodation has **more than doubled** since the pandemic.
- The waiting list for social housing hit a **record high** of 21,000 households in 2023.

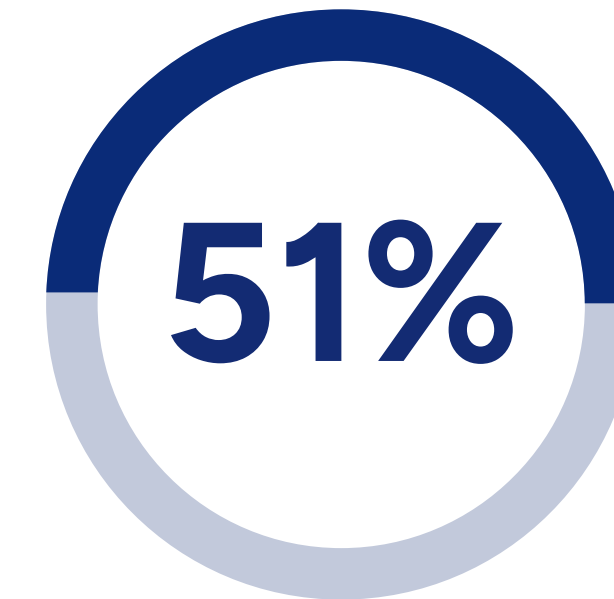
Many of our clients live in unsafe conditions because of damp and mould, extreme disrepair, rodents, domestic abuse, hate crime, overcrowding, and more. They may be facing a 'no-fault' eviction – where a landlord doesn't have to give a reason to evict. Many are already experiencing homelessness.

Housing stress can have a serious and lifelong impact on people. It can affect children's education, cause physical illness, and harm the mental health of whole families.

Across the year, clients came to us with a range of issues, many with more than one



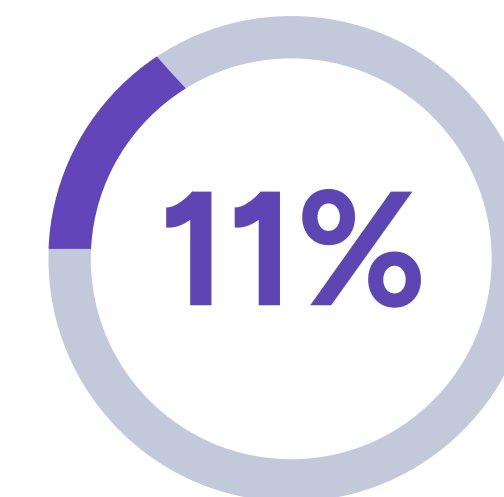
In need of rehousing



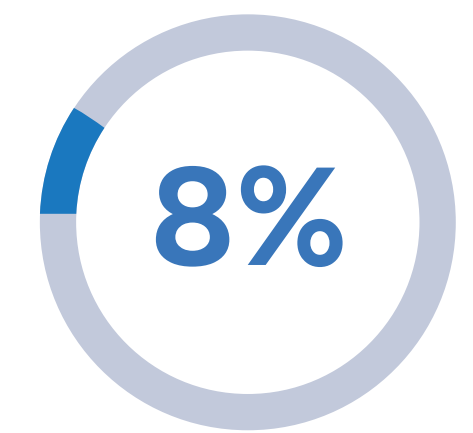
Experiencing or threatened with homelessness



Poor housing conditions/disrepair



Issues with landlord



Housing related debt

Our approach

Rights-based

We believe that quality housing is a human right. With in-depth knowledge of housing and homelessness legislation, **we equip our clients with a solid understanding of their rights** and hold those in power accountable where necessary.

Collaborative

In recognition that housing stress is usually accompanied by additional issues, we work in partnership with other specialist organisations. **By combining our expertise, we provide a more efficient and holistic service** to local people. As part of a network of over 40 local organisations, we also sign-post and refer clients where appropriate.

Empowering

We care deeply about each client. We treat everyone with the dignity they deserve, actively listening to understand each person's unique circumstances. As well as acting on their behalf, **we upskill our clients to take charge of any future housing issues.**



After accessing our service:

94%

had a better understanding of their rights, options, and responsibilities

88%

felt better able to plan and manage their own affairs

72%

knew where to go for any future advice and support

Our impact

Rica's story

Rica came to us feeling so upset – she'd been without hot water or heating for a year and her flat was covered in black mould. Her landlord kept entering her home without warning and was **verbally abusive to her and her children**, even throwing their belongings around. He'd also increased the rent, which, on a low income, she simply couldn't afford.

Working with our partner, Talking Money, we put together the evidence needed to prove the unaffordability of the home and the family's lack of safety. We presented this to the council, asserting they needed to offer Rica emergency accommodation. However, due to Rica's immigration status, **she wasn't entitled to any**, nor could she access social housing.

Unable to pay her rent, the **harassment from the landlord was only getting worse**. She was in despair at this point, feeling very trapped. Working together, we found a solution. Talking Money were able to get **her rent debt cleared and grants to feed her family**. We, at Housing Matters, found out that Rica could apply for a new immigration status under the EU Settlement Scheme. If successful, she'd be entitled to temporary accommodation and, eventually, **permanent social housing** from the council.

Thankfully, her new immigration status came through. **With renewed hope, we went back to the council**. This time, they accepted their duty to provide the family with temporary accommodation and eventually, permanent social housing.

Now, in their temporary property and able to bid for social housing, Rica feels so relieved that **she and her children are safe from the landlord**, and is delighted that they'll soon move into a **secure, suitable, and permanent home**.



Who we support

We support anyone facing housing crisis or homelessness around Bristol.
Many of our clients face multiple barriers when trying to access appropriate housing.



65%
are from a minoritised ethnic group



92%
rely on benefits, either fully or to top up their income/pension



49%
have a physical disability or health condition



47%
are parents/carers of dependent children



31%
speak English as a second language



51%
have a mental health condition



1,024

Cases worked



892

Households helped
(a 109% increase since 2020/2021)



1,993

People supported

The power of partnership

The HomeFull Project: working together to improve housing circumstances and build financial resilience for Bristol families.

The impact of our HomeFull project...



We prevented homelessness for/helped to rehouse **51%** of families.



We secured **£120,000+** in additional income for families e.g., in the form of cleared debt, benefits, and foodbank referrals.

For many people, **housing stress isn't a stand-alone issue.** Housing crisis can push people into debt – and debt only worsens their housing struggles. Their situations are even more complex when they're responsible for children.

To end this cycle, since 2020, we've partnered with Talking Money, a local debt advice charity, alongside Bristol Children's Centres to create our HomeFull project. Now, **Bristol families can access housing and debt support all at once**, and in a trusted place many already go – children's centres.

Last year, people came to HomeFull in **more severe housing and debt crisis than ever before.** On average, each client's case took six weeks longer to resolve compared to the previous year.

Through the power of partnership, **we helped these families even more efficiently than we would have as separate charities** – by quickly sharing information with each other and combining our expertise.

“**...Working in partnership with Housing Matters and Bristol Children's Centres has enabled us to give a holistic service, understanding the wider context of people's lives and reducing the need for them to re-tell their stories to multiple organisations.**”

Tamra
Talking Money



Creating lasting change



The Housing Roundtable

In response to a huge increase in homelessness post-pandemic, **Housing Matters established the 'Housing Roundtable,'** which is run in partnership with Shelter and Bristol Law Centre. Through this forum, we collaborate with other housing organisations, **combining our expertise, resources, and influence** to develop realistic solutions to Bristol's housing crisis.

Bristol Court Advice Network (Bristol CAN)

The idea for the Bristol CAN **emerged from Roundtable discussions,** and resulted in a new partnership between Housing Matters, Shelter, St Paul's Advice Centre, Bristol City Council's Welfare Rights and Money Advice Service, and Bristol Law Centre. Through the project, expert advisers from the partnership **rotate attendance at Bristol Court,** giving timely advice to clients during eviction court cases.

As well as directly helping clients, we create meaningful, long-term change within Bristol's housing sector.

We join forces with organisations who share our vision for Bristol, disrupting the systems that trap people in housing crisis.

We push for positive policy change by supporting local and national movements, providing key information to strengthen them.

We share and gain knowledge via the Bristol Homelessness Forum, the Temporary Accommodation Action Group, the Housing Roundtable, and other forums.

Growing stronger

At Housing Matters, we're on a journey of continuous improvement.

We've established **two** initiatives to ensure that local people get the housing help they deserve, now and into the future.

Our Advisory Board

With lived **experience of housing crisis/homelessness**, members of our Advisory Board share their experiences of navigating Bristol's complicated housing system with us. This **insight is key to shaping our service**, and we use our platform to amplify their voices around Bristol's housing sector. It's been a huge success, and we've loved getting to know local people better! So far, **the Advisory Board has helped us improve the accessibility of our service**. They have advised us on how we can better reach clients and played a key role in redesigning our website.

Our Trainee Scheme

As one of Bristol's few specialist housing advice agencies, it's vital we can keep meeting the ever-increasing demand for our service. Through our Trainee Scheme, **we recruit local people with great potential, coaching them to support clients through their housing hardship**. After a year, they 'graduate' as a skilled Housing Adviser, ready to help tackle Bristol's housing crisis.



...It's inspiring to know our stories could help shape an easier path for those in housing crisis.



Kerri

Advisory Board member



Bristol's housing crisis is serious and needs to be tackled urgently. I'm so glad to be training with an organisation working on the frontline of it.



Ruth

Our current trainee

HOUSING MATTERS

We'd like to say a huge thank you to our funders and other supporters last year. You enabled us to be there for people during some of the hardest times of their lives.

We'd also like to thank our partners – we feel so grateful for your collaboration and expertise.

Thank you to our Advisory Board for sharing your insight to help us better support others experiencing housing stress.

Finally, thank you to our amazing clients for your co-operation, determination, and ongoing faith in us.

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