Asedau Segur
Camau Cynaliadwy Cymru

Dormant Assets
Sustainable Steps Wales

Cyflwynir gan

CRONFA GYMUNEDOL Y LOTERI GENEDLAETHOL

Delivered by

THE NATIONAL LOTTERY COMMUNITY FUND

Create Your Space

Summary report



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Introduction

Create Your Space (CYS) was a seven–year programme which ran between 2017–2024. It was funded by The National Lottery Community Fund alongside the Dormant Asset Scheme¹. Six projects with a total of £7.488 million in grants were funded. OB3 was commissioned by The Fund to evaluate CYS. This summary report provides an overview of the evaluation findings for grant holders, enabling them to identify some key learning for future projects, and to reflect on the excellent work that has been carried out. The report also provides an overview of CYS itself, the key outcomes and outputs, some of the key highlights of the individual projects and some lessons and recommendations for any similar programmes in the future.

CYS aimed to transform open spaces in an environmentally sustainable way. It focussed on bringing community members together to shape and deliver for their communities. The three primary outcomes of the programme were:

- 1. getting local people fully involved in shaping the transformation of their local outdoor space
- 2. enabling people to transform the way they view and use outdoor spaces
- **3.** supporting organisations and communities to have more confidence in taking action by getting involved in activities that improve their local communities.

A table of the projects, alongside a summary of each project, can be found at Annex A at the end of this report.

^{1.} The Dormant Asset Scheme enabled moneys in bank accounts that has not been used in many years to fund good causes. The money was paid by the banks and building societies to authorised reclaim funds, such as The National Lottery Community Fund.

Underpinning principles of the CYS programme

The programme was designed with the following principles in mind:

- · meaningful community engagement and involvement purposeful participation
- robust transparent partnership and collaboration
- · sound evidence-based decision making
- · recognising needs and opportunities
- holistic approaches to coherent delivery of multiple benefits
- creating connectivity
- complementing and augmenting wider programmes and initiatives
- strategic planning, effective timescales, and phased delivery
- flexibility in funding and delivery
- ensuring future sustainability
- effective learning and delivery support
- dedicated knowledgeable personnel
- innovative monitoring and measurement of outcomes and impact.

Methodology

The methodology (that is, the research methods used) utilised by OB3 encompassed a combination of desk-based reviews of previous CYS documentation and reports, as well as surveys and interviews to gain a first-hand account from people involved in the programme. 39 survey responses were received from different projects, as well as interviews with two Fund representatives and 25 representatives across the six projects. This allowed OB3 to fully understand how the CYS programme had operated, and enabled the voices of the people involved in the projects to form an integral part of the overall evaluation.

Aims and objectives of the CYS programme

CYS has been incredibly successful in investing funding into places and communities in need of support, emphasising that the funding was appropriately allocated across the six projects. Some of the areas lacked any quality green spaces in the first place, while others did not utilise the green spaces they had available. CYS successfully addressed both issues.

Putting people in the lead was an important aspect of the programme, and it generally achieved this by supporting people to take the lead on transforming the outdoor spaces in their specific communities. The projects that were more successful at doing this were led by place—based community organisations, meaning that they were organisations which operated specifically within the community that the project was based. This was an important foundational principle of the programme, where the money was invested into place—based communities. People from the communities themselves are best placed to understand the needs of the local area, and it was shown that the place—based community projects demonstrated more meaningful community engagement than those that were

operating from outside the area. A real sense of co-design and co-production was embraced in the place-based community projects, which should form the cornerstone of any successful community project.

The Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) Act 2015

The programme was designed so that its aims were consistent with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. This is a piece of Welsh legislation aimed at improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. There is extensive evidence that the projects have positively contributed towards the well-being goals of the Act which are:

- a prosperous Wales
- a resilient Wales
- a healthier Wales
- a more equal Wales
- more cohesive communities
- a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh Language
- a globally responsible Wales.

Welcome to our Woods was a good example, with the project noting that it was the first community in Wales to have interpreted the Act into a deliverable outcome, which local people can fully understand. It is encouraging to see that CYS projects not only implemented the general principles of CYS, but also specific Welsh Government legislation and its aims. This achievement should be applauded, and community projects in the future should use it as a model of how to implement the Well–Being of Future Generations Act.

Community engagement

Levels of community engagement varied across the six projects. **Vision for our Valley** and **Welcome to our Woods** were exceptionally successful in engaging the community, primarily because they were led by organisations which had a strong presence in their communities. Project staff also noted the importance of being based in communities which had a genuine passion for their local area, which allowed their commitment and sense of belonging to shine through. This was invaluable to the success of these two projects.

Other projects did note lower levels of community engagement, but this was not a result of a lack of effort, rather mitigating factors such as the COVID pandemic. Additionally, **Our Back Yard** and **Woodland Routes to Wellbeing** started from a much lower base than other projects, therefore lower overall levels of community engagement were to be expected here. Survey responses in relation to the sustainability of community engagement were positive, suggesting that there will be continuing community involvement in sustaining the CYS projects long–term.

Governance arrangements

Governance arrangements (that is, the procedures and monitoring systems in place) varied between the projects, with **Cwlwm Seiriol** and **Woodland Routes to Wellbeing** utilising effective partnership work to deliver their projects. **Our Back Yard** was led by Groundwork North Wales, although the steering group was changed over time to include greater representation from the community itself, which should be welcomed. This led to the project become better aligned with the programme objectives.

Responsibility for the **Welcome to our Woods** project was transferred to Welcome to our Woods Ltd when it became a fully consisted limited company during the second year of delivery. This has been a successful arrangement, with opportunities for local people to become a member of the company. **Roots to Shoots** was led by Brymbo Heritage Trust; a registered charity led by a board of trustees. Additional project partners were also brought in, such as Cadw and Wrexham County Council. Finally, **Vision for our Valley** was delivered by Ynysybwl Regeneration Partnership. Strong governance was provided by the project over the whole course of delivery, and there was a real emphasis on supporting the community to deliver the projects for themselves.

Project achievements and barriers to success

There were two primary factors that affected CYS over the seven–year funding period: the COVID–19 pandemic and land and asset transfer issues. These are discussed below.

The COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID–19 pandemic had a major impact upon project progress between March 2020 and mid-2021. It affected the availability of staff, methods of engaging with communities and the nature of the provisions made available. However, the response of the projects should be commended, especially those delivered by place–based organisations, as they were able to respond immediately to local needs and issues. Although some projects noted that the pandemic had affected community engagement and the recruitment of long–term volunteers, the CYS projects did mostly recover from the impact of the pandemic.

Woodland Routes to Wellbeing experienced an unexpected positive outcome from the pandemic. Their Laundry Garden became overgrown, and staff were unable to maintain it due to COVID restrictions as access to the garden was prohibited. However, due to its overgrown nature, it became a haven for wildlife, and the site has now been maintained as a bio–diverse and eco–friendly space. Rare butterflies have been sighted, as well as other insects that had not been spotted in a long time. The volunteer group that maintains the garden plan to maintain it as a wildlife site after the CYS project finishes, with support from the National Trust. The project should be applauded for its resilience and adaptability, and the volunteers should be commended for their commitment in maintaining the garden.

Land and asset transfer issues

Land and asset transfer issues affected the delivery of four projects, but they did largely overcome these issues, thanks in part to the seven–year window to resolve the issues or to find an alternative way of delivering similar outcomes. This highlights further benefits of the long–term funding programmes that The National Lottery Community Fund is now moving towards.

The **Roots to Shoots** project successfully overcame their land and asset transfer issues, as they initially had difficulties in trying to obtain a long–term lease for the land. Wrexham County Council and CADW intervened and played a crucial role in ensuring that all key interested parties were in agreement and were committed to the aims of the project. The lease was eventually agreed through sheer resolve and resilience and project staff are hopeful that 90% of the proposed capital works will be achieved. There is also optimism that this agreement will garner new interest within the community, with the agreement of a long–term lease representing a commitment to the continuation of the project.

Other issues

The other issues that impacted project delivery over the second half of the CYS programme were:

- Increased costs All six of the projects had to adjust to the cost-of-living crisis during the last couple of years of delivery.
- 2. Partnership working Whilst partnership work was largely successful, some projects noted issues such as partners being disjointed from each other, partners becoming overly–focused on their own organisational priorities and finally, issues arising from the COVID pandemic, such as conducting face–to–face meetings.
- 3. Capacity and staffing On the whole, staff turnover was well accommodated across the projects, especially with those projects that were well embedded in their communities and had effective governance arrangements in place. However, projects that were less embedded in their communities were more heavily affected by staff turnover as they were more heavily dependent on the knowledge of one person.

Key project achievements

The three key achievements for each of the CYS projects is highlighted below.

Cwlwm Seiriol

- Activities for local primary schools such as green woodcraft, bushcraft, learning about plants, making bird boxes, and poetry workshops.
- Community events such as harvest festivals, coppice festivals, Christmas tree festivals, basket weaving workshops, natural dyes workshops, as well as family and children's events, such as forest school activities.
- Delivery of activities to those attending warm spaces at Llandegfan.

Roots to Shoots

- Engagement and support to volunteer led groups including Southsea, to undertake green space maintenance, and Moss Valley, to improve interpretation and access.
- Activities at the Brymbo site, such as involving forest schools and play sessions, delivery of foraging courses and biodiversity surveys, and placement of a temporary container on the site to store equipment and act as a nucleus for volunteers.
- Initial community engagement work and delivery of activities across the community, such as forest school sessions at St Marys school and community play sessions at two sites.

Our Back Yard

- The project worked across 14 different green spaces in Connah's Quay.
- The Quay Clean initiative was launched, which set out to address litter and fly tipping issues.
- Additional funding secured via the Landfill Tax in 2020 has improved the Quay Wetlands as well as the nature reserves at Llwyni and Broadoack Woods.

Vision for our Valley

- Creation of walking paths and trails across the forestry, and establishment of three groups (runners, cyclists and riders) to help maintain these.
- Acquisition of the Bwth site to provide a community hub and youth facility.
- Environmental improvements including clean ups, litter picking, and delivery of Grow to Taste sessions.

Welcome to our Woods

- Creation of Cwm Saerbren micro hydroelectric scheme, which generated nearly 13,000kwh of electricity between February 2021 and February 2022.
- Creation of the Penyreglyn community woodland space which is used by groups such as the youth engagement team at Valleys Kids.
- The Crop Cycle project: the former Tapper petrol station site was redeveloped into a food growing and education facility on the high street.

Woodland Routes to Wellbeing

- Clean up of the Duffryn Woodland, removal of litter and fly tipping, and addressing areas of woodland overgrowth.
- Capital development of the Laundry building and garden at Tredegar House, which is now maintained by volunteers and used by Growing Space participants.

Delivery of open access play session for local children, with over 900 children engaged and 12,000 individual visits made. The project has created a safe space for children to play, enjoy and learn about nature.

Impacts and legacy

This section will now summarise the difference that the projects made, with reference to six key impacts.

Impact 1

Outdoor spaces and local environments have been improved, and accessible outdoor spaces have been created

Every project achieved this to varying degrees. Staff from **Vision for our Valley** noted that the project had been instrumental in 'creating the spaces where things can happen', and staff from **Welcome to our Woods** emphasised that the project had 'provided space for people to grow' across Treherbert. A particular highlight of the **Welcome to our Woods** project was the acquisition of the Old Rhondda Brewery Site, which was developed into a forestry operations hub to support small scale wood processing. It was also developed into a health and wellbeing space.

There is good evidence that projects made a positive contribution to improving their local environments, by enhancing and maintaining outdoor green spaces within their communities. The improvements can be grouped into those which focus on:

- habitat improvement
- access to green spaces, including physical improvements, installation of a new signage and digital trails
- development of new community assets
- removing litter and fly tipping.

Impact 2

Links are in place between local and community organisations

This links back to the importance of community engagement discussed earlier in this report. Levels of community engagement varied between the different projects. **Welcome to our Woods** was particularly successful by establishing links and facilitating discussions between local communities and national organisations, such as Natural Resources Wales as part of the Valleys Skyline project. All projects were able to demonstrate clear evidence of wider collaboration work and worked with a range of different organisations and community groups.

Impact 3

Community members and volunteers have meaningfully contributed to design and delivery process of the project and have taken more control of their local environment

This was successfully delivered across all projects, with evidence that some had consulted extensively before and during project delivery. Beneficiaries were heavily involved, as all engaged volunteers to help improve and maintain local green spaces. Interestingly, beneficiaries were more involved in the design and development phase rather than project

delivery, with feedback provided to OB3 demonstrating that communities were slightly more involved in the decision–making process. This should be a consideration in any similar future projects, with an emphasis on ensuring that volunteers remain interested and enthusiastic throughout the whole process. However, it should be noted that the COVID–19 pandemic had a part to play in this, by affecting the projects' abilities to recruit volunteers.

However, there were clear successes during delivery in some projects. For example, during the **Cwlwm Seiriol** project, the older volunteers noted that they felt less isolated and had benefitted from the development of a new personal support network. This is testament to the sense of community that was built during the projects, and demonstrates the ability of community projects to bring volunteers together to build companionship.

Projects were able to demonstrate that local communities had taken more control of their local environment, although there is some uncertainty as to whether this will be sustained after project funding comes to an end. A particular highlight was **Welcome to Our Woods**, where there was excellent evidence that the community was taking greater control over their local environment. A membership–led community organisation was formed in Treherbert, along with the creation of various community groups which are now being sustained by community volunteers. The Vision for Our Valley project was also successful, where it was clear that the community had taken ownership of local green spaces, and different interest groups continue to manage the community assets improved via CYS. Butcher's Pool and Caban Guto are excellent examples of this, where local volunteers have taken responsibility for these sites.

Impact 4

Increasing community pride of place and cohesion

Most CYS projects helped to increase community pride of place and improved cohesion, although partnership working was difficult at times. **Welcome to Our Woods** worked with a diverse group of people, and collaborated with Avanti Cymru, Welsh Hip Hop artists, local artists and others to deliver a Hydro Jam session during 2021. The project's annual report noted that 'something special involving inclusiveness in our countryside happened at Treherbert Hydro Jam last year'. Additionally, there was some incredibly positive feedback about how the **Our Back Yard** project increased a sense of pride in the area:



Without the Our Back Yard Project, Connah's Quay green spaces would have continued to decline and more antisocial behaviour would have flourished. The project has given a sense of pride back in the area.

Impact 5

Volunteers and local people have gained a wide range of skills and experiences, and projects have created sustainable businesses and job opportunities

Training provision within the projects was a vital component, and all projects successfully delivered a wide range of formal and accredited training to participants and volunteers. **Cwlwm Seiriol** provided a wide range of training courses for its volunteers, learning about traditional methods of maintaining green spaces, such as stone pitching. **Woodland Routes to Wellbeing** arranged training such as health and safety, stress management and a variety of environmental training. The project staff also delivered play sessions, and they gained a range of accredited training including Level 2 Award in Playwork Practice and Level 2 Certificate in Playwork. Offering the opportunity for accredited training should be encouraged, as it allows staff and volunteers to gain formal acknowledgement of their good work.

Four projects delivered educational sessions to children and young people. The feedback gathered from all projects was incredibly positive, with participants gaining new knowledge in a fun setting, with the opportunity to spend more time outdoors. Feedback from school staff in one project was exceptionally positive:

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The children had a great day developing new and different skills. Many children are disconnected from nature these days and this day showed how much they enjoy themselves.

Training and upskilling opportunities were provided to volunteers and staff, and in some cases, volunteers actually progressed into employment as a result of their project experience. Project volunteers reported increased confidence, improved social interactions and improved mental health. A Caban Guto volunteer noted that it had given them a 'new lease of life', and it is refreshing to see that Caban Guto allowed volunteers to form a close friendship bond.

Similarly, positive experiences were noted from volunteers involved with the **Our Back Yard** project. One volunteer noted that it was the social aspect of volunteering that they particularly enjoyed:

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We always get local people stopping to chat and giving us positive feedback. I also really enjoy learning about the wildlife in my area and learning new practical skills such as scything, hedge laying and coppicing.

It is clear that not only did CYS project volunteers gain vital skills, but it also allowed them to develop new friendships and to become more sociable within their communities.

All projects created a range of new leisure opportunities. This did not always amount to sustainable businesses and jobs, but they equipped participants with skills and experiences

which would be of value to them in securing employment in the future. CYS has therefore helped people acquire the skills needed to get jobs, rather than creating jobs directly. **Welcome to our Woods** established the Crop Cycle facility, which is a community food growing and learning space which aims to address food poverty in the area. It operates community days, a being well café and plant swapping opportunities.

Impact 6

Increased use of outdoor green areas, and a greater understanding of the benefits of outdoor spaces on health and wellbeing

All projects increased the number of local people utilising outdoor spaces. The Butcher's Pool, which was part

of the **Vision for our Valley** project, saw an increase in the number of visitors using the facility, and staff from across the projects observed an increase in the use of local paths and local park spaces. One particular success was the **Woodland Routes to Wellbeing** project, which developed over 3000m2 of land for community use across Duffryn Woodlands and the Laundry Garden at Tredegar House. The improved outdoor space has provided an opportunity for regular children's play sessions, where 10,000 people visited the sessions over the seven–year delivery period. The sessions allowed children to learn new skills and to play in a safe and supervised outdoor environment.

All six projects reported that they had helped to improve understanding of the value of outdoor spaces to health and wellbeing. Projects were also supported by a positive shift in attitude towards the outdoors, which took place during the pandemic. For instance:

- A stakeholder at **Our Back Yard** noted, 'At Quayscape garden and the wetlands, improvements at the infrastructure makes visiting the sites more enjoyable. Bringing people together to look after the green spaces has had a huge impact on wellbeing'.
- At Woodland Routes to Wellbeing, participants noted an improved understanding of the value of outdoor spaces for health and wellbeing, which is demonstrated by the large number of families which engaged with the outdoor play sessions.
- Improvement in wellbeing was a common theme across the projects, with a parent involved in **Vision for Our Valley** noting, 'It was fun and good for us–parents and grandparents and the children, it was the first time a lot of the children did anything and it gave us a lot of pride in our work, we loved doing it'.

Long-term sustainability

Sustainability of outcomes

There are strong prospects that **Welcome to Our Woods, Vision for Our Valley** and **Roots to Shoots** will sustain their outcomes and activities post CYS funding, primarily because of the place–based focus of these organisations. **Vision for our Valley** has clear exit plans for their projects and are already being sustained by strong and committed volunteer groups. Additionally, they have been successful in securing other sources of funding, such as from Western Power Distribution and the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund. **Welcome to Our Woods** has also been successful in securing other sources of funding, and the project has ambitious plans to sustain initiatives such as the Crop Cycle site. Finally, **Roots to Shoots** has secured a further one year no–cost extension from the National Lottery Community Fund to complete the capital works planned on the Brymbo Site.

The other three projects are unlikely to continue in their current shape and form, and will face a significant challenge to sustain their outcomes post–funding. Unfortunately, securing additional, adequate levels of grant funding to support the employment of staff on the projects has been difficult. This will undoubtedly impact on the project's' abilities to sustain their outcomes post–funding, although the good work completed during the delivery of projects should not be undermined.

However, the projects will not cease to exist entirely, as there is evidence that some activities will be continued by volunteer groups and partner organisations. Effective partnership work will be vital in ensuring that this is done successfully, and there is some evidence of this already taking place. For example, **Cwlwm Seiriol's** Llanddona grazing element may be taken forward by partners such as Natural Resources Wales and Anglesey County Council, and successful partnership work such as this should be encouraged.

Securing other funding

Five of the six projects have secured at least some other sources of funding over the course of their delivery, however only three have secured funding to continue their delivery post—CYS.

Programme administration

The role of The National Lottery Community Fund

The projects have been positive about the role that the Funding Officers have played. Their flexibility and empathy was highlighted as a strength, and projects were appreciative that the officers retained close contact with them over the delivery period.

The projects considered CYS to have been an excellent source of funding given its long–term funding window and the flexibility offered by The Fund to accommodate changing circumstances and needs. The approach was noted as particularly useful given the unexpected event of the COVID pandemic and the recent cost of living crisis.

Projects and stakeholders did note that wider interests in CYS at a more strategic level across The National Lottery Community Fund and the Welsh Government had possibly diminished over time. There was a suggestion that this lack of interest could mean that valuable lessons from the projects have been lost.

Collaboration

There have been regular networking events between the CYS projects, and this was highly valued, with one stakeholder observing that this is where the magic happens. The networking events were an opportunity for project staff to collaborate, share experiences and learn from each other. Due to the COVID pandemic, there was a shift to online networking events, but this was actually welcomed given that the projects were geographically dispersed across Wales. A hybrid approach was then utilised after this, and feedback on the networking events was exceptionally positive, and is testament to the willingness of the projects to learn and share experiences with each other.

Conclusion

Below is a word cloud from the OB3 report, in which are some words that have been used by survey project representatives to describe the CYS projects:



The CYS programme was an ambitious, but successful, programme. It has provided long-term funding opportunities enabling communities to transform their local green spaces in an environmentally sustainable way. All six projects used the funding appropriately, and there was clearly an attempt to align projects with the CYS objectives and the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Projects made a positive contribution to improving their local environments and have all successfully delivered a wide range of activities within their communities.

Whilst the above clearly shows the strengths of projects, there are weaknesses, too. Only three of the projects were, or have the potential, to be truly transformational in the way that they put local people in the lead in a meaningful manner. This was due to the bottom up approach to project design, and it allowed the projects to 'provide a space for people to grow'. Projects which were more top–down in the way they were designed did not truly embed activities into the communities, which is partly a result of being delivered by organisations that are not at the heart of the community.

Recommendations for the future

Attributes of good programme design

- a six-month development phase should be introduced for successful short–listed applicants
- a foundation year period to allow projects to recruit staff, undertake community engagement, and establish land and site access agreements
- flexibility for the funder in relation to funding and project outcomes
- the provision of a learning support provider to support funded projects.

Some further recommendations

- **1.** The National Lottery Community Fund should consider introducing a formal mid–term review of long–term funded projects in the future to address significant delivery issues.
- 2. The National Lottery Community Fund should consider only awarding funding to applicants who either already have land transfer and access agreements in place or are not dependant on land transfer in order to achieve their aims and objectives.
- **3.** Any similar funded programme should request that projects submit a fully costed business plan as part of a mid-term review.
- **4.** Any similar funded programme should build in provision of a learning support provider and network facilitator.

Annex A

Project	Location	Start Date	End Date	Funding
Cwlwm Seiriol	Seiriol ward, Anglesey	01 September 2017	31 August 2024	£1,098,000
Roots to Shoots	Brymbo, Wrexham	01 June 2017	1 June 2025	£1,996,482
Our Back Yard	Connah's Quay, Flintshire	01 November 2017	31 October 2023	£649,941
Vision for our Valley	Ynysybwl, Rhondda Cynon Taf	01 August 2017	28 February 2025	£1,273,099
Welcome to our Woods	Treherbert, Rhondda Cynon Taf	01 May 2017	31 December 2024	£1,016,881
Woodland Routes to Wellbeing	Duffryn, Newport	03 July 2017	3 July 2024	£1,453,861

Summary of projects

Cwlwm Seiriol

The objective of this project was to bring the community of Seiriol together to an improved, managed and sustainable natural environment. It looked to implement and substantiative a replicative model of how active community stewardship of valuable, biodiverse natural assets can be achieved.

Roots to Shoots

The primary aim was to improve physical spaces and the ways they are used, and connections projects that will bring about changes in the ways people view and use spaces and work with people from within the community to develop them further.

Our Back Yard

The purpose of the project was to conserve and enhance the multiplicity of open spaces across the community of Connah's Quay.

Vision for Our Valley

The project used the local environment to develop a project that will address poverty, low skills and ill health in the area and create a green, sustainable and highly networked valley with an emphasis on community owned assets, businesses and activities.

Welcome to Our Woods

This project worked with the community and partners to develop new ways of connecting people and their natural environment, managing natural resources and local spaces differently for health, wellbeing, training and employment.

Woodland Routes to Wellbeing

The project worked with Duffryn and neighbouring areas to engage some of the most deprived families in the planning, development and delivery of community led projects. They worked in partnership with Growing Space, Keep Wales Tidy and the National Trust to raise awareness of the natural environment and the positive impact this can have on the physical and mental wellbeing of local residents.

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