

***“Best Course I’ve Done
Since Being in Jail”:***

**Unlocking the Value of Family
Wellbeing Training in
Correctional Settings**

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Cairns and Yarrabah,

2025

Acknowledgements

We want to say a big thank you to all the people who joined the Family Wellbeing (FWB) program. Thank you for coming to the sessions, sharing your stories, and helping each other along the way. You are the heart of this work.

We thank the Yarrabah Leaders Forum for having the big idea to start this project. Your strong leadership made it happen.

We thank the Lowitja Institute and the research centres before it. You believed in using research to help make real change in our communities. You also gave us the first bit of money to start this project, which helped us get more support.

We thank the kind and visionary Australian donor who gave long-term support.

Finally, we thank Kristi Giselsson for facilitating and supporting the initial stages of Lotus Glen FWB project partnership and Corrections staff Ann Nicholls, Tanya Parker and Carmel Pedron, Elissa Williams and Claire Walker for their unfailing support for and work in implementing the FWB program in Lotus Glen.

Disclaimer

The purpose of this report is to report on the rollout and impact of the Family Wellbeing (FWB) program delivered at Lotus Glen Correctional Centre (LGCC) between 2022 and 2023.

The statements and opinions included in this report are given in good faith and in the belief that such statements and opinions are not false or misleading.

Funding for this project was provided by an anonymous donor.

Suggested Citation

Baird, L., Whiteside, M., Walters, J., & Tsey, K. (2025). *“Best course I’ve done since being in jail”: Unlocking the value of family wellbeing training in correctional settings*. CQUniversity Australia and the Yarrabah Leaders Forum.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Australia continues to grapple with the significant human and economic costs of incarceration, disproportionately borne by First Nations peoples, who represent nearly one-third of the national prison population. Persistently high recidivism rates underlie the urgent need for culturally safe, evidence-informed rehabilitation programs. The Family Wellbeing (FWB) program offers a proven, high-impact solution that meets this need—delivering outcomes that promote personal transformation and long-term reintegration, while offering strong value for money.

Methods

Between 2022 and 2024, six short FWB courses were delivered at Lotus Glen Correctional Centre (LGCC) in Far North Queensland. Designed and led by trained facilitators with cultural authority and professional expertise, these 10-hour courses focused on meeting the emotional, relational, and practical needs of incarcerated Indigenous men. At the end of each course, participants completed a short feedback questionnaire combining quantitative ratings and open-ended questions.

Results

Despite operational disruptions common to correctional settings—including lockdowns and staffing constraints—the program achieved high engagement and completion rates. Of the 82 enrolled participants, 53 completed the course and 51 submitted written feedback. Many expressed a desire to continue their learning—through formal qualifications such as a Certificate II—or to train as facilitators themselves. This points to the program’s untapped potential to build long-term capacity from within the prison system.

The impact of the Family Wellbeing (FWB) program was both powerful and deeply personal, as evidenced by participant feedback and evaluation data. A striking 82% of participants reported a strong likelihood—rating 8 out of 10 or higher—that they would apply the skills learned through FWB in their everyday lives. These skills spanned key areas such as personal growth, family relationships, and future employment prospects, reflecting the program’s relevance across multiple dimensions of wellbeing. As one participant expressed, “*It (FWB) helps me through life and its hardships. It gives me strategies to face battles in life.*”

Three consistent areas of transformation emerged from the evaluations. Participants described profound *personal change*, including improved emotional regulation, increased resilience, and a renewed sense of purpose. Many also experienced *relationship change*, with better communication skills and reduced interpersonal conflict contributing to healthier social dynamics. Importantly, *future planning* became a focus, with participants demonstrating greater clarity around goal setting and reintegration to society pathways.

Beyond individual growth, the course sparked something more collective: a culture of informal peer mentoring began to take shape organically during the sessions. This peer-led support amplified the program’s reach and reinforced its core messages, suggesting a strong foundation for sustainable, inmate-driven change. Perhaps the most powerful endorsement came from the unanimous feedback that every participant would recommend the course to others—especially to young people, family members, and fellow inmates.

Discussion

The Family Wellbeing (FWB) program has demonstrated significant and consistent impact on incarcerated individuals, transforming their lives by enhancing their emotional resilience, communication, and problem-solving skills. These outcomes support rehabilitation efforts within correctional facilities and help participants gain the confidence and self-awareness necessary for successful reintegration into society after release. Many individuals describe the program as "life-changing," reflecting a profound shift in their ability to envision a positive future beyond prison walls.

The findings from the FWB program evaluation in prisons not only underscore the program's effectiveness but also align with broader national research. In a study of 750 FWB participants across Australia, the program's impact was particularly pronounced for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants, who reported significantly improved outcomes compared to non-participants. FWB participants showed a **13% improvement in family functioning, 74% higher cultural wellbeing, and 21% greater involvement in community decision-making**. These results highlight the program's deep personal and community-level impact, making it an essential tool for promoting long-term social cohesion and individual empowerment.

Moreover, an **economic analysis conducted by Deloitte** revealed that for every \$1 invested in FWB, there is an estimated **\$4.60 return in social and economic benefits**. These findings emphasize not only the personal transformation FWB facilitates but also its **sustainability and value** in driving positive, measurable economic outcomes.

The long-term success of the FWB program requires continued investment in **post-release support**. Programs like the Yarrabah Business Development Hub are critical for ensuring that individuals who complete FWB are supported as they reintegrate into society, especially by fostering opportunities for **self-employment and community involvement**. By scaling these community-based hubs and establishing strong follow-up services, the transition from prison to community life can be much more successful.

Recommendations

To maximize the impact of the FWB program and ensure that its benefits extend beyond the prison walls, we recommend the following:

1. Integrate FWB into Correctional Systems Nationwide

The FWB program should be embedded within both juvenile and adult correctional systems as part of formal rehabilitation efforts. Offering accredited FWB micro-credentials will provide participants with critical life skills while preparing them for reintegration into society. These credentials can also serve as a stepping stone to further education and employment opportunities, helping to reduce the risk of reoffending. Sustainable funding and service delivery models are currently being developed to support the long-term integration of FWB into correctional systems, providing project partners with a range of options to consider.

2. Expand and Support Community-Based Reintegration Hubs

Community initiatives like the Yarrabah Business Development Hub are essential to successful reintegration. These hubs should be strategically expanded into communities with high incarceration rates and unemployment. By providing continued mentorship, support for self-employment, and business coaching, these hubs enable individuals to rebuild their lives in a sustainable way, reducing their chances of recidivism and contributing to their local economies. The development of sustainable FWB funding and service models includes mechanisms to link correctional participation with community-based reintegration hubs, ensuring program continuity and support beyond release.

3. Foster Partnerships Between Universities and Corrections

Formal partnerships between universities, corrections services, and local communities should be cultivated to track long-term outcomes and create pathways for FWB graduates to continue their education. These partnerships can provide both educational opportunities and career pathways for individuals transitioning out of prison, further improving their prospects for success. Embedding sustainable funding and service models within these partnerships will help secure program longevity and alignment with evidence-based policy and practice.

4. Prioritize Self-Employment and Entrepreneurship

Self-employment offers a powerful complement to traditional employment, especially for individuals with limited formal qualifications. Providing individuals with the tools, resources, and mentorship needed to start their own businesses can lead to greater economic independence and community contribution. Initiatives such as the digital art business models introduced to former inmates in Yarrabah show that entrepreneurship can be a viable path forward for those who have been incarcerated. Sustainable FWB funding and service models business plans under development will explore ways to integrate entrepreneurial support and business incubation into rehabilitation pathways.

Conclusion

The **Family Wellbeing (FWB) program** is more than an educational intervention; it is a **strategic investment in human potential**. By combining early intervention, robust rehabilitation, and post-release support, FWB provides individuals with the tools they need to rebuild their lives after incarceration, while also creating a more cohesive and resilient community.

The **evidence** is clear: FWB works. The **economic benefits** are measurable, and its impact is tangible at both the individual and community levels. The time to scale the program is now. **The infrastructure is in place**; what is needed is the **vision, funding, and commitment** to expand FWB's reach, ensuring that every individual who engages with the program has the support they need to succeed—not only inside prison but also once they re-enter society.

Introduction

This report explores the rollout and impact of the Family Wellbeing (FWB) program delivered at Lotus Glen Correctional Centre (LGCC) between 2022 and 2023. The initiative forms part of a long-term effort to translate over two decades of FWB empowerment research into practical, real-world solutions, particularly for frontline workers, job seekers, and people in the criminal justice system preparing to re-join their communities (Perera et al., 2022).

First Nations Australians continue to be significantly overrepresented in the prison system, making up almost one-third of the national prison population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2024). These high incarceration rates are closely tied to systemic inequality, intergenerational trauma, and social disadvantages. Many incarcerated individuals also face complex challenges such as mental illness, substance dependence, and histories of violence or abuse (Heffernan et al., 2012). The limited availability of culturally safe rehabilitation programs further compounds the issue, contributing to persistently high rates of reoffending. Programs like FWB—designed by and for Indigenous people—offer a much-needed alternative, grounded in cultural identity and empowerment.

FWB was first developed in 1993 by Aboriginal Australians as a strengths-based program to build personal resilience, emotional awareness, and the capacity for informed decision-making (Tsey & Every, 2000). It supports individuals in reconnecting with core protective factors: family, culture, language, and Country. Delivered through small, facilitated group workshops, the program uses storytelling and shared reflection to cover vital topics—from emotional regulation and healthy relationships to grief, conflict resolution, and community leadership. This narrative approach not only fosters critical thinking and empathy but also encourages deep personal growth.

FWB has been implemented across diverse cultural and geographic contexts, with a robust evidence base supporting its effectiveness. From remote Australian communities (Tsey et al., 2003; Whiteside et al., 2016, 2018) to international settings such as Papua New Guinea (Kitau et al., 2011), Timor-Leste (Tsey et al., 2018), and China (Yan et al., 2019), participants consistently report transformative outcomes—ranging from improved emotional wellbeing to new pathways in education, employment, and leadership. Between 1993 and 2021, over 5,400 participants from 80 organisations and communities have taken part in FWB workshops (Perera et al., 2022).

A recent national study of 750 FWB participants further highlights the program's impact. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants reported significantly improved outcomes compared to non-participants, including 13% higher family functioning, 74% higher cultural wellbeing, and 21% greater involvement in community decision-making (Williamson et al., 2023). Further, an economic analysis conducted by Deloitte found that for every \$1 invested in FWB, there is an estimated \$4.60 return in social and economic benefits (Holland et al., 2024; Deloitte Access Economics, 2022). These findings speak not only to the program's personal and community-level impact but also to its long-term sustainability and value.

Project Setting, Data Collection, and Analysis

Nestled in the hills near Mareeba in Far North Queensland, Lotus Glen Correctional Centre (LGCC) houses more than 1,000 male inmates. Over 75% identify as Indigenous, with many

coming from remote communities marked by intergenerational trauma, limited access to services, and low literacy levels. In response to these challenges, the FWB program was introduced at LGCC through a partnership between trained FWB facilitators, correctional staff, and the generous support of an anonymous philanthropist.

At LGCC, FWB was delivered as a 10-hour short course, broken into five weekly sessions of two hours each. The sessions were structured around key topics:

- Human Qualities and Basic Needs
- Life Journey and Personal Reflection
- Relationships and Conflict Resolution
- Grief, Loss, and Emotional Resilience
- Goal Setting and Financial Wellbeing

At the end of each course, participants completed a short feedback questionnaire combining quantitative ratings and open-ended questions. Using a scale from 0 to 10, participants rated how likely they were to apply what they'd learned in various areas of life—personal, family, work, and community. A score of 0 meant “not much at all,” while 10 indicated “very much.”

Participants also had the opportunity to share comments about what they liked, what they found less helpful, and who they thought could benefit from the program. Suggestions for improvement were also welcomed. In addition to participant feedback, facilitators documented their own observations on participant engagement, literacy-related challenges, and which teaching approaches seemed most effective.

A thematic analysis of the qualitative data was then carried out to identify common themes and insights. These reflections are helping to shape how FWB might be further adapted and expanded to meet the specific needs of correctional environments—where culturally relevant, strengths-based programs like FWB can play a key role in breaking cycles of incarceration and supporting meaningful rehabilitation.

Results

Between 2022 and 2024, six FWB short courses were delivered at LGCC, engaging 82 participants in total. Participation steadily grew year-on-year—starting with one course in 2022 and expanding to three by 2024.

Of the 82 participants, 53 completed the full course, and 51 filled out the evaluation survey. Completion was sometimes disrupted by prison realities—lockdowns, staff shortages, or early releases—but overall, engagement was strong. When men could attend, they showed up and they shared openly. (Figure 1).

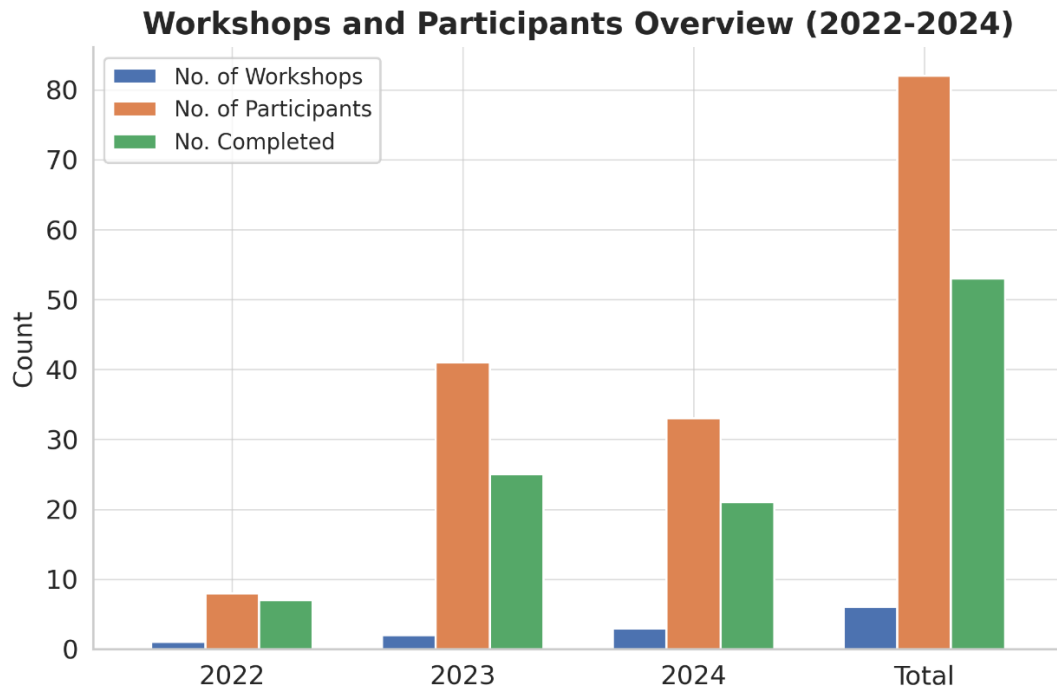


Figure 1: Courses and Participants

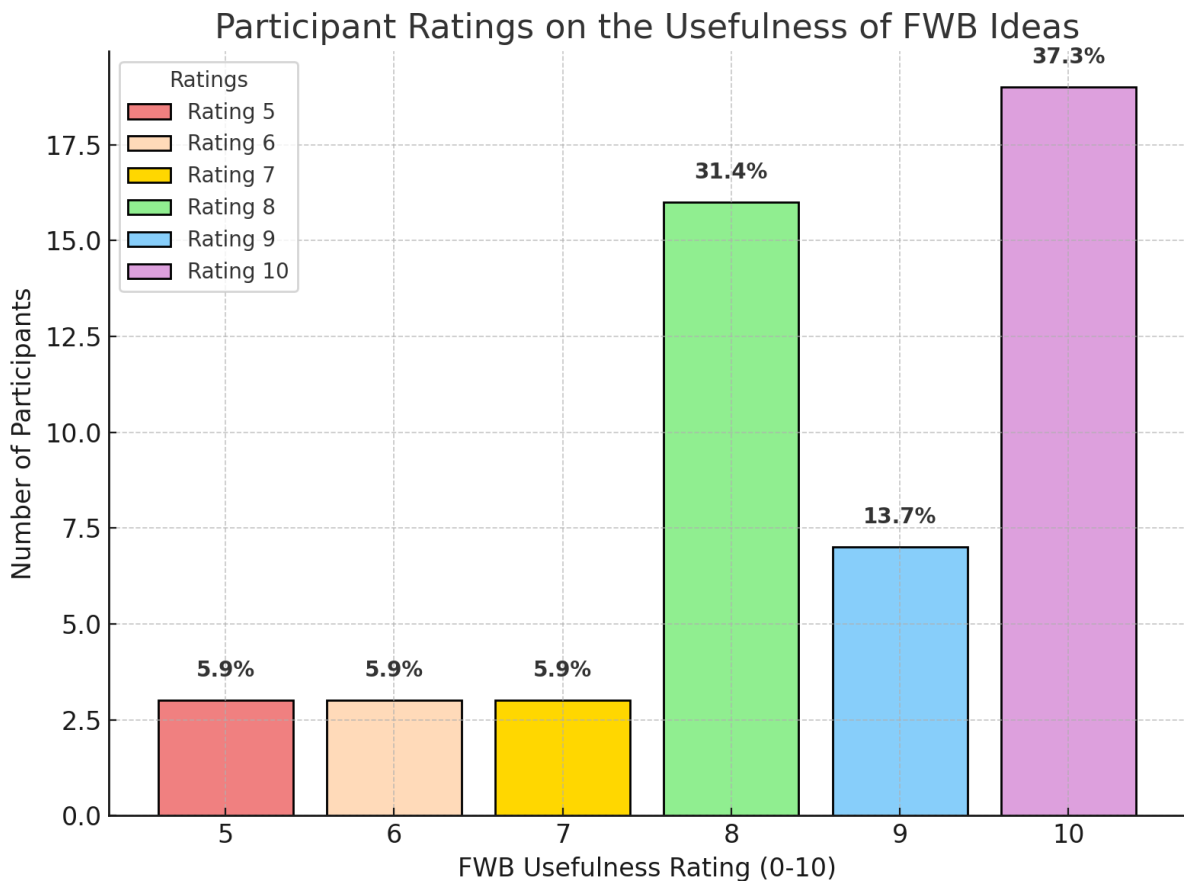


Figure 2: Participant ratings of FWB

The numbers tell a clear story: 82% of participants (42 out of 51) rated their likelihood of applying FWB concepts in their lives as 8 or higher out of 10. (Figure 2). But it's in their words that the real impact comes to life. Three themes emerged again and again: *Personal Change. Relationship Change. Future Planning.*

Personal Change

For many, the most immediate shift was internal. Participants spoke of greater self-awareness, emotional regulation, and a clearer sense of who they were—and who they wanted to become.

“I try to be as mindful as possible towards my mindset and emotions as this helps how you carry yourself on a day-to-day basis.”

Others shared how the course helped them reframe hardship and see new possibilities:

“It’s given me a better way of looking at things and dealing with life problems.”

“This course has given me a new look on life and will help me move forward with my life journey.”

The Basic Human Needs framework struck a deep chord. Men spoke about managing grief, expressing emotions, and building resilience. One said:

“The facilitators were great in explaining feelings and emotions, helped me understand loss and how to deal with it.”

Mental wellbeing, physical activity, and even spiritual connection came into focus:

“I work, play sports, train.”

“Gets you thinking about what’s important in life.”

Relationship Change

Strong, healthy relationships are central to rehabilitation. Participants reported major shifts in how they related to others—whether through better communication, less conflict, or simply learning to listen.

“Because a better relationship with my family and friends and good mates.”

“It’s good to communicate and get feedback on how to resolve problems to a better life.”

Others appreciated learning how relationships work—and how to carry that knowledge forward:

“I liked the ‘Understanding Relationships’ part of the course, so I can use it on the outside.”

Some even stepped into informal mentoring roles, helping others through what they’d learned:

“Inmates come to me about their problems. I always tell them to do the Family Wellbeing course.”

Future Planning

Beyond emotional growth, participants began to imagine—and plan for—a life after release. While concerns about housing and support remained, most men left the course with clearer goals, renewed motivation, and practical strategies for navigating what comes next.

“Keep up the positive thinking and planning.”

“Be a good role model for my community and my kids.”

Many explored new training or employment options. Some were keen to study the FWB Certificate II to learn more about the foundations of wellbeing, while others saw themselves becoming facilitators down the line. A session on financial wellbeing sparked interest in self-employment—9 out of 11 participants expressed interest, with some already having started small businesses before incarceration.

Out of 51 survey responses, just seven participants offered suggestions for improvement. The most common suggestion was to make the course longer. Some wanted more sessions or extended modules. Others suggested offering the course to more inmates. But the overwhelming feedback was positive. Most participants felt the course delivered exactly what they needed—and more.

Would they recommend the course to others? Absolutely, every single participant said they’d recommend FWB to someone else. They saw its value not just for themselves, but for others in prison, young people, families, and anyone struggling with relationships, emotions, or direction in life. FWB was more than a course—it was a turning point.

Discussion

The implementation of the Family Wellbeing (FWB) program inside correctional facilities has demonstrated something many funders and training providers are searching for—**real, measurable impact** in one of the most complex and under-resourced environments in Australia. Despite the disruptions common to prison life—frequent lockdowns, staff shortages, and limited support services—participants didn’t just attend FWB; **they embraced it!**

Many of the incarcerated men described FWB as the most meaningful course they'd ever done, often calling it **“life changing.”** They weren't just learning; they were reflecting, healing, and beginning to imagine new possibilities for their lives. Through FWB, **participants found their voice, developed emotional resilience, built communication skills, and unearthed a renewed sense of purpose**—skills that are critical both inside and beyond prison walls.

What makes this program even more compelling is the consistency of its impact. The outcomes observed inside correctional settings closely mirror more than 20 years of FWB research and practice across diverse Australian contexts—from job seekers in Yarrabah to frontline health workers in the Northern Territory (Holland et al., 2024; Deloitte Access Economics, 2022; Williamson et al., 2023; Perera et al., 2022). Regardless of the setting, the pattern remains: **FWB works.**

The story doesn't end at release. Follow-up support in the community is key to ensuring the program's long-term impact. In Yarrabah, the Business Development Hub is now actively engaging with men returning home post-release, supporting them to turn their new mindset into meaningful action. Most of these men had never considered self-employment as a realistic path—until now. But this is an important pathway to financial security given the barriers to mainstream employment after prison.

Joanne, from the business development hub, has already supported three men after release. One of them, a passionate gardener, is growing a thriving backyard crop of tomatoes, cucumbers, and herbs. With Joanne's help, he's preparing to scale his efforts into a small business supplying fresh produce and laying hens—feeding his family and staying out of the justice system. Two other young men, both talented artists, are working with Joanne to explore **digital art and print-on-demand business models**, opening doors that require little to no startup capital.

These examples highlight a critical takeaway: **Without structured follow-up and community support, the momentum built through FWB can be lost.** With the right backing, individuals can translate the emotional growth and clarity they gained inside into sustainable, purpose-driven lives outside.

The fact that men are actively seeking out continued guidance post-release—asking Joanne to visit their homes, sharing their business ideas, and taking concrete steps—shows that rehabilitation doesn't end at the prison gate. It must be part of a **continuum of care**, rooted in local leadership and practical pathways.

Conclusion and Recommendations

FWB is not just a “feel-good” program. It is a **strategic, evidence-based investment in human potential**, and the benefits are both measurable and profound. Every dollar spent on prevention and rehabilitation through programs like FWB can translate into significant savings down the line—in reduced incarceration rates, improved mental health outcomes, and increased employment and economic participation.

For these gains to be fully realised, **post-release follow-up and local support must be built into the model**. As the Yarrabah example shows, individuals leaving prison can and do thrive—when given the tools, trust, and tailored support to succeed.

Now is the time to scale this proven model:

- **Embed FWB micro-credentials** in both juvenile and adult correctional systems to teach life skills early and often.
- **Establish formal partnerships** between universities, justice services, and local community hubs to provide a seamless transition from prison to community.
- **Support employment and self-employment pathways**, especially for those with limited formal education or prior work experience.

Governments want to close equity gaps. Correctional systems want better rehabilitation outcomes. Communities want safer, stronger futures. **FWB is a catalyst for all three.**

The infrastructure is there. The evidence is clear. What's needed now is investment—and the **vision to follow through**. Let's not wait for another generation to ask why no one ever taught them these essential life skills. Let's teach them now—and support them every step of the way.

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