### MOSAIC

A PUBLICATION OF INTERFAITH MINISTRIES FOR GREATER HOUSTON SUMMER 2024



# OPERATION IMPACT PREPARED SENIORS FOR HURRICANE SEASON

Texans know all too well that hurricane season brings with it a need to prepare. This hurricane season was forecasted to be an active one. Interfaith Ministries' Meals on Wheels program helps homebound seniors each year through Operation IMpact to help them prepare for a storm. On June 1 in Houston and June 8 in Galveston County, volunteers delivered 5 small, shelf-stable meals to seniors.

Operation IMpact ensures that our seniors are prepared in case a storm disrupts our deliveries.

#### **OPERATION IMPACT PRESENTING SPONSOR:**



#### HARRIS COUNTY SPONSOR:



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#### **LET'S HELP MORE SENIORS TOGETHER**

We at Meals on Wheels Greater Houston and Galveston County have a big goal – to deliver meals to homebound seniors who need our help. We have many waiting for our support right now.

#### **WE NEED YOUR HELP:**

A gift of \$250 or whatever you can afford will make a big difference. This will help us feed seniors in our community, providing them with nutritious meals and a friendly visit.

#### **EVERY BIT COUNTS**

No amount is too small. Every donation helps us get closer to our goal of supporting seniors in our community.

https://www.imgh.org/250-2/

### GIVE TO MEALS ON WHEFT S



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Martin B. Cominsky

### LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

Dear Friends,

Every day across the Greater Houston/Galveston area, thousands of homebound seniors count on us to deliver a nutritious meal. As the largest Meals on Wheels provider in Texas, we have been serving meals and more for over forty years.

The seniors we serve are parents, grandparents, friends and neighbors. Over 82% of those we serve say that our meals are their primary source of nutrition. Rising food costs and decreased funding have slowed our ability to add more people to the program. Can you please help? Please consider making a gift using the QR code below.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, we served a total of 6,500 unduplicated seniors annually. That number increased year over year throughout the pandemic and beyond. In 2023, we served over 8,000 unduplicated seniors with over 1.9 million meals. In planning for 2024, we have been on track to serve over 8,600 seniors but had to stop adding new seniors to the program due to decreased funding. Our cost per lunch meal, which is set by our government contractors, has also increased through the years, with a dramatic increase of 15% in 2023. It costs more than ever to deliver meals.

Funding for Meals on Wheels comes from both public (government contracts) and private (contributions) sources. During the pandemic, IM received significant supplemental funding through the American Rescue Plan Act and private donors also increased their giving to meet the overwhelming need during that critical time. Our program not only kept operating throughout the pandemic but grew to serve more seniors than ever before. Now that the crisis has passed, the supplemental funding has ended. Economic uncertainty has, at the same time, led to a decrease in contributions. The growth in the number of seniors served was made possible through a combination of higher-than-normal, COVIDera government funding and significantly increased contributions in response to the pandemic.

Nonprofits across the country experienced a post-pandemic decline in giving. "Giving USA: The Annual Report on Philanthropy", the longest-running and most comprehensive report on the sources and uses of charitable giving in America, reported a significant decline in charitable giving starting in 2022 after strong years in 2020 and 2021. This was only the third time giving had fallen in the past 40 years.

We are feeling the effects of the end of pandemic-era funding, the national decline in donations, and increased food costs. Yet thousands of seniors rely on us for a daily meal, and more elderly neighbors need our help. Please consider making a gift to Meals on Wheels today through the QR code below to ensure that we can continue to meet this critical need.

Sincerely,

#### **OUR CEO ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT**

Martin has announced his planned retirement effective June 30, 2025. He has led IM since 2015. During this time, we have grown from a \$17 million to a \$60 million agency.

Meals on Wheels program grew from serving an average of 4,000 enrolled seniors daily to 5,600 and from delivering 1.5 million meals annually to over 1.9 million.

Refugee Services welcomed 1,500 refugees from 11 countries in 2015 and over 6,000 from 32 countries in 2023.

IRCP offered programming to 800 adults and youth in 2015, and touched over 5,700 participants this past year.

We opened the Vic Samuels Center for Volunteerism and Civic Service, housing Volunteer Houston and Serve Houston - programs that provided over 14,000 volunteer and service hours to over 70 local nonprofits in 2023.

"Martin is a truly unique leader," says IM Board Chair Dr. Kathy C. Flanagan. "He combines compassion with an innovative, forward-thinking approach that has resulted in tremendous growth for Interfaith Ministries over the years. We are so grateful for his service."

Martin has led IM through Hurricane Harvey, Winter Storm Uri, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the fall of Kabul that brought thousands of Afghan allies to Houston who were resettled by IM. Interfaith Ministries is led by an engaged, diverse Board of Directors that will embark on a search for the organization's next President and CEO.

Thatin

Martin B. Cominsky President and CEO



# WELCOME TO OUR 2024 BOARD CHAIR, DR. KATHY C. FLANAGAN!

IM is pleased to welcome its 2024 Board Chair, Kathy C. Flanagan, M.D. Our Board Chair has a passion for community service. In addition to leading IM's board, she serves on the boards of Menninger Clinic and Justice Forward. She is the immediate past president of the Houston Medical Forum, a professional society of African-American physicians that promotes the art and science of medicine. She has chaired several nonprofit galas, including IM's Tapestry Gala, and received several community service awards.

In 2021, 100 Black Men, Metropolitan Houston Chapter, Inc. named her Woman of the Year because of her commitment and service to the underserved communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Flanagan was awarded the Houston Medical Forum 2023 Lifetime Achievement Award for her unwavering commitment to the mission of that organization and her outstanding achievements and service to the greater Houston community.

Former Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner proclaimed Dec. 1, 2023, as Dr. Kathy C. Flanagan Day recognizing her outstanding achievements, unyielding dedication and transformative contributions that have greatly enhanced the quality of life and healthcare within our city, declaring her "an inspiration and a true beacon of service and excellence."

"As a psychiatric physician who has a passion for community service, I can attest that each of IM's pillars have significant impact on the overall wellbeing on of all of us; individually and collectively as a community," shares Dr. Flanagan. Her work in the field of mental health relates to each of IM's core programs – social isolation among homebound seniors, trauma faced by refugees, the common need for connection among people of all faiths, and the well-being resulting from volunteer and civic engagement.

Dr. Flanagan, who is board certified in psychiatry, has practiced medicine for more than 30 years in Houston's Upper Kirby area. A graduate of The University of Texas at Austin, Dr. Flanagan received her medical degree from The University of Texas Medical School at Houston, now known as McGovern Medical School. She completed her general adult psychiatric residency at Baylor College of Medicine.

She is a member of several medical organizations, as well as community service organizations.

We are honored to have Dr. Flanagan as our 2024 Board Chair!



If you prefer to receive Mosaic by email, please let us know by emailing mmagee@imgh.org.

#### **ESTATE GIFT DOUBLES IMPACT FOR REFUGEE FAMILIES**

Several months ago, a long-time supporter informed us that he was executor for an estate and that the deceased's wish was to distribute some of the estate to charity. The executor, in honoring the donor's wishes, approached IM about making a gift to Refugee Services. The donor had a passion to help refugees and also to address food insecurity. Currently food insecurity is a critical need among recently arrived refugee families. In consulting with IM leaders, the executor decided to make the gift toward food assistance for refugees. To leverage the gift, the executor set it up as a challenge gift, matching dollar for dollar other donations to the cause - up to \$50,000!

As a result, \$100,000 was raised for our refugee families! This funding will enable them to buy groceries without further stretching their modest budgets, at a time when they are working to find employment.

This gift creates a wonderful legacy for the donor, that brings joy beyond his lifetime. Bequests like this make a real difference for IM and the people we serve. For more information on including IM in your estate plans, please contact Jerry Haus at jhaus@imgh.org or 713-533-4965.

Dr. Kathy C Flanagan



# VIC SAMUELS CENTER FOR VOLUNTEERISM & CIVIC SERVICE



# SAVE THE DATE JUNE 11-14 | HOUSTON, TX



**EARLY BIRD REGISTRATION OPENS MARCH 1, 2024** 

#### **VOLUNTEER HOUSTON CO-HOSTS POINTS OF LIGHT CONFERENCE 2024**

IM's Volunteer Houston program is proud to co-host the Points of Light Conference 2024, a global celebration of volunteerism and service taking place from June 11 through 14 at the Marriott Marquis Houston.

With the theme "Leading Change Together," this conference aligns perfectly with our mission. IM President and CEO Martin B. Cominsky states, "We've long been a leader in volunteerism and civic service. This conference is a chance to celebrate not only the 50th anniversary of Volunteer Houston but also the 100th anniversary of President George H.W. Bush and the thirtieth anniversary of AmeriCorps." Our V.P. of Volunteerism and Civic Service, Andrea Shiloh, adds, "Points of Light is a beacon in a world that can be very dark... it's about collaboration, innovation, and transformative change. That transformative change component is going to make the future, not only of our city but the future of our country, so much more solid, so much more certain."

The 2024 conference promises unique features including an impressive lineup of speakers, a vibrant food truck festival at Discovery Green, and opportunities to explore Houston's cultural richness. Both Martin and Andrea believe that the conference will have a lasting impact on Houston, fostering connections that extend beyond the event itself. Andrea emphasizes, "It's about making sure that when all is said and done, those who have a purpose and passion have an opportunity to do that in a way that is meaningful and impactful to them."

Tickets can be purchased at pointsoflight.org/conference.



#### SERVE HOUSTON PROGRAM CREATING LEADERS

SERVE HOUSTON AmeriCorps empowers young people eager to contribute their skills and passion to create positive change. Whether it's distributing food to fight food insecurity, leading activities for kids to uplift their emotional well-being, or beautifying school playgrounds and parks, SERVE HOUSTON provides a platform to not only cultivate leadership, teamwork, and problem-solving skills but also to enrich one's education and build a strong sense of civic responsibility.

The SERVE HOUSTON AmeriCorps Class 4 program will run this summer from May 28-August 2, 2024. Class 5 will run this fall. Learn more about joining the program and keep your eyes peeled for the fall application at servehou. org.

SERVE HOUSTON Class 3 at their Swearing-In Ceremony at the Linda and Fred G. Marshall Building.

#### **SERVE HOUSTON EMPOWERS YOUNG WOMEN**

Young Women's Prep Network (YWPN) is a network of single-gender, college-preparatory public schools that enroll predominately first-generation, low-income students of color with the goal of getting their students both to and through college. Our SERVE HOUSTON AmeriCorps members serve at their two Houston-area schools: Young Women's College Preparatory Academy (YWCPA) in HISD and Young Women's Leadership Academy in Aldine ISD. Our three members, Juan Zavala, Megan Arteaga, and Allison Gatewood-Merrit, are teaching classes on social-emotional learning, organizing college visits, and establishing an alumnae committee to provide peer support for YWPN alumnae currently enrolled in college.





#### H-E-B HELPS WITH GIFT CARDS



H-E-B has been a long-time supporter of our Meals on Wheels seniors. Each year, they donate gifts cards that allow us to buy breakfast items to distribute. This year, they also helped our refugee families by donating gift cards for groceries.

#### STOCK THE SHELVES FOR ANIMEALS



Animeals provides pet food and vet care to over 1,300 dogs and cats of Meals on Wheels seniors. Our shelves are bare and we need your help! Please make a gift to "stock the shelves" at imgh.org/donate/ meals. Thanks to two anonymous donors, every dollar donated will be matched 2 to 1! If you prefer to give kibble instead of cash, visit our Amazon wish list at: https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/2YG9Y71UUUE8M

#### **LEAD DONORS SEPT 2023-MARCH 2024** (\$1000+)

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#### MEALS ON WHEELS A LIFELINE FOR CLIFFORD

Clifford, a proud resident of Galveston County for nearly five decades, has been experiencing the positive impact of Meals on Wheels for almost a year now. At the age of 67, Clifford treasures time spent at home with his family in their long-standing home. The convenience and variety of the meals provided by Meals on Wheels have been a true blessing, especially given the challenges his family faces.

Difficulty cooking and frequent doctor visits have made the Meals on Wheels service a lifeline for Clifford and his family. Even their beloved dog, a 2-year-old brown and beige beauty, benefits from Animeals, which provides free pet food.

Clifford introduced his next-door neighbor, Bernice, to Meals on Wheels. Clifford believes in lending a hand to others, both humans and animals.

As he receives his Meals on Wheels deliveries, Clifford's appreciation for the program grows each day. Each visit from Kim, the sweet and kind driver, brings not only nourishment but also a sense of connection and care. While he takes life one meal at a time, Clifford finds contentment in the knowledge that Meals on Wheels makes each day a little brighter.



A happy smile from Clifford

# INTERFAITH RELATIONS & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

# LESSONS IN HOPE & HEALING AT IMPOWER LECTURE

Over 200 people attended our "Birmingham and Beyond: Living a Life of Love after Hate" to hear Lisa McNair's story of triumph over evil, resiliency, and forgiveness after her sister was killed in the 1963 16th Street Baptist Church bombing. Now an author, speaker, and bridgebuilder, Lisa has chosen a path of love over hate, and shared her story at Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston's IMpower Lecture 2024.



#### GERSHENSON LECTURE EDUCATES AND INSPIRES



Pictured above from the 5th Annual Gershenson Lecture "Democracy, Faith, and the Rise of Christian Nationalism" are: Rev. John Wurster, Bishop Mike Rinehart, Amanda Tyler - Keynote speaker and Executive Director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, Rev. Dr. Tamla Wilson, Rev. Lynn Hargrove, Kim Mabry, Rev. Alexander E.M. Johnson

#### **WELCOME TO OUR HOUSE VIDEO SERIES**

Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston (IM) is thrilled to announce the launch of its new educational video series, "Welcome to Our House," which highlights the common elements of houses of worship representing various world religions across Greater Houston. The series aims to inspire community members to explore the rich tapestry of religious and cultural diversity within the region.

Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston would like to extend its gratitude to the sponsors of this series. Major support was provided by The Eleanor and Frank Freed Foundation and additional support was provided by Debbie and Floyd Kearns.

The inaugural videos, available on IM's YouTube Channel and website at imgh.org/welcome-to-our-house, showcase a Protestant church, Catholic church, Jewish synagogue, Muslim mosque. Future installments will feature Sikh gurdwaras, and Hindu temple. Buddhist temples, Bahá'í centers, and Jain temples, with the entire series expected to be completed by June 2024.

Jeff Horton, Content Creation Manager for the series, expressed gratitude to the team members and contributors who made this initiative possible. "I want to thank my colleagues Jodi Bernstein, Vice President, Kim Mabry, Program Manager, and Gayla Wilson, Program Manager, our Interfaith Relations and Community Partnerships Committee chaired by Rev. Dr. Tamla Wilson, our faith leaders featured in the series, including Rev. Eleanor Colvin, Imam Muhammed Haq, Rabbi Brian Strauss, and Rev. John Wurster, our focus groups, and others who helped in our research stages along the way."

The "Welcome to Our House" video series is part of Interfaith Ministries' broader efforts to promote understanding and dialogue of our community's religious and cultural diversity.

The series is accompanied by a Discussion Guide designed for use with student, corporate, community, and faith groups.

# IRCP PARTNERS WITH CHILDREN'S MUSEUM HOUSTON ON 'FAITHFUL FRIENDS' EXHIBIT



The Children's Museum Houston is embarking on an inspiring journey with its upcoming exhibit, "Faithful Friends." Partnering with the Interfaith Relations and Community Partnerships department (IRCP), they are

delving deep into the diverse tapestry of faith traditions within the Greater Houston area. With the generous support of the Lilly Endowment, this collaboration is showcasing religions and fostering understanding and unity.

Led by IRCP's Kim Mabry and Jenny Abbott, the creative and educational teams have been on immersive tours of local houses of worship, including Hindu and Buddhist temples, mosques, and various Christian denominations. Through these experiences, they're gathering information and connecting with communities firsthand. Kim, through the Children's Advisory Council, is ensuring that real voices and faces of children from different faiths are integral to the exhibit. By engaging with key figures across diverse faith communities, they're weaving a rich narrative that celebrates inclusivity.

Scheduled to open in October 2025 for a two-year stint at the museum and another year in a traveling exhibition, "Faithful Friends" promises to be an interactive and enlightening experience. By including voices from lesser-known traditions like Zoroastrianism and Bahai, and emphasizing the importance of representation, this exhibit aims to foster empathy and understanding among visitors, young and old alike. As we eagerly anticipate its unveiling, it's clear that the Children's Museum Houston is creating an exhibit that builds bridges of cultural appreciation and acceptance.

#### ILEAD PROGRAM LAUNCHES WITH MLK DAY OF SERVICE

Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston's iLead Youth Engagement Program kicked off its 2024 session with a special focus on the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. This year's program, consisting of 19 students and parents, honored Dr. King's principles of respect and service by actively participating in volunteer activities that contribute to the betterment of the community.

The iLead Kick-Off, on Sunday, January 14, 2024, at the Linda and Fred G. Marshall Building, featured a diverse group of 8th graders engaged in meaningful service projects, focused on a volunteer activity inspired by Dr. King's vision of the Beloved Community. According to the King Center, Dr. King's Beloved Community is "a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger, and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it." Participants and parents came together to assemble bags of groceries that were donated to Spring Woods Middle School in Spring Branch ISD.

In alignment with Dr. King's ideals, the service project addressed the issue of food insecurity, a critical concern in our communities. iLead participants received a brief overview of food insecurity prior to their volunteer activity, emphasizing their role as "Beloved Community creators." A fourth-grade student who participated in HISD's MLK Oratory Speech Contest attended and read their speech aloud.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s holiday is designated as a national day of service, promoting volunteerism and community improvement. The iLead Youth Engagement Program embodies this spirit by engaging participants in hands-on service projects that resonate with Dr. King's vision for a society free from poverty, hunger, and hate.

"We believe in inspiring, educating, and connecting students and parents across diverse faith and cultural backgrounds," says Gayla Wilson, Community Engagement Program Manager – IRCP at Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston. "Through iLead, we aim to foster stronger interpersonal relationships, communication skills, and networking abilities, all while instilling the values of service and respect inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr."

Interfaith Ministries thanks CITGO for their generosity as lead sponsor of the 2024 iLead Youth Engagement Program. iLead is also sponsored in part by Lisa and John Walker and the Rabbi Samuel E. Karff Memorial Fund.

#### **ILEAD 2024 SPONSOR:**



### **REFUGEE SERVICES**

# REFUGEE CARE NAVIGATOR APP BRINGS CONNECTIONS

Interfaith Ministries' Refugee Services is thrilled to announce the development of the RefugeeCare Navigator App, a pioneering digital platform designed to connect refugee clients with vital local resources, fostering education, awareness, and support on health, wellness, and related topics. The app is set to empower refugee families in Houston by providing easily accessible and comprehensible information in multiple languages.

The app will serve as a comprehensive resource hub, offering information on navigating the U.S./ Texas medical system, health-related community events, webinars, video tutorials, orientations, and a healthcare locator tool. The app will be available in English, Dari, Pashto, and Spanish, for the diverse linguistic needs of the refugee population. To cater to diverse reading skills, the app will incorporate a voice feature compatible with both iOS and Android platforms.

Interfaith Ministries actively seeks content partnerships with organizations, clinics, and stakeholders, aiming to provide authentic and relevant information to vulnerable populations.

Recently the app was used to provide refugees with vital storm information in their preferred language during a powerful storm to support their safety.

The development of the RefugeeCare Navigator App is made possible through funding from the US Committee for Refugee and Immigrants (USCRI). This grant aligns with the project's goal of empowering digital literacy and fostering self-sufficiency among refugee communities. Praveena Lakshmanan, Community Engagement Program Manager, says, "The RefugeeCare Navigator App is a bridge to local resources, addressing the gap between available information on the internet and the authentic resources needed by our diverse clients. By curating content and





#### Requirements:

- · Access to a Car
- Valid Driver's License and Car Insurance
- Clean Driving Record
- Flexible Schedule and Patience
- Cultural Sensitivity

#### Benefits:

- · Sense of Fulfillment
- Building Empathy and Compassion
- Creating Meaningful
  Connections
- Cultural Exchange and Understanding

Airport pickup is a vital role that involves greeting refugee families at the airport and facilitating their transportation to their new apartment. Your flexibility is key as the time spent at the airport may vary. If you are interested in learning more about this opportunity, please contact us:

Email CEVolunteer@imgh.org Or Call 713-533-4900

We look forward to hearing from you!



forming partnerships with various stakeholders, we aim to build a relevant and accessible resource for refugees and vulnerable populations in Houston."

Interfaith Ministries' Refugee Services invites organizations, clinics, and stakeholders to join in content partnerships and contribute to the app's mission. Whether through articles, videos, or other resources, collaboration is key to ensuring the app's success in providing valuable information to those in need.

For more information or to explore content partnership opportunities, please contact Praveena Lakshmanan at plakshmanan@imgh.org.



#### **WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT GROUPS MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

Refugee Services' empowerment groups have been making significant strides in fostering a sense of community and empowerment among their clients. One such initiative is the introduction of the Spanish-speaking women's group, which serves as a beacon of support and guidance for newer arrivals. By incorporating members who have been in the program for up to two years as role models, clients empower each other to navigate their new lives with confidence. The program takes a clientcentered approach, allowing the women to lead the way in determining the content of sessions and activities. From visits to local museums like the Museum of Fine Arts Houston and the Children's Museum to outings to places like Mala Market, these sessions provide educational opportunities and space for camaraderie and cultural exploration.

The empowerment groups' efforts culminated in our end-of-year celebration, where Arabic, Pashto, and Darispeaking groups came together for the first time. This gathering showcased the refugee community's diversity and emphasized the bonds formed through shared experiences. The event featured a panel where women from each group shared their journeys and triumphs, solidifying the sense of unity and support.



#### THE BIG US PROJECT - COLLABORATIVE THEATRE PIECE BY HOUSTON'S REFUGEES



On January 20th and 22nd, clients from IM's Refugee Services and other Houston-area refugee resettlement agencies put on a collaborative theatre performance in partnership with Brave Little Theatre Company, led by Executive Director Troy Scheid.

Three clients from the Dari-speaking women's empowerment group created and performed a piece titled "The Blind Future of Afghan Girls," behind a sheet to respect their cultural boundaries so they could speak freely about the challenges facing girls and women in Afghanistan since the fall of Kabul, and the necessity of education for all.

Thirteen clients from the Arabic-speaking women's empowerment group created and performed a piece titled

"A Night of Ramadan" in which they introduced their American friend Michelle to the significance and meaning behind celebrating Ramadan, sharing their culture and food with the entire audience. This piece was facilitated by Troy Scheid and Dayana Halawo, who works in IM's Refugee Services program. Six clients from the men's empowerment groups, containing Dari, Pashto, and English speakers, created and performed a piece titled "Eid Celebration," in which they demonstrated and explained the importance of Eid celebrations for them and their cultures.



## INTERFAITH MINISTRIES

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FOR GREATER HOUSTON



Samuels Family Foundation

**Greater Houston** 











This program is supported by a grant from the Texas Veterans Commission Fund for Veterans' Assistance. The Fund for Veterans' Assistance provides grants to organizations serving veterans and their families. For more information, visit TVC.Texas.gov.

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Interfaith Ministries could not carry out its work without community support! We are grateful to all our donors for their generosity.

Become an IMpact Society member:

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To find out how you can include Interfaith Ministries in your estate plans, contact **Jerry Haus at jhaus@imgh.org** or **713-533-4965**.

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