



UNITED IS THE WAY

2025 IMPACT REPORT



UNITED WAY
of the Plains



Serving the people of south-central Kansas since 1922.



Special thanks
to our print sponsor:



SERVE UNITED volunteers support our community through United Way programs and initiatives. Monthly, members meet up to network and help bolster local nonprofits, like the Kansas Food Bank (pictured left).

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NEW LOOK. SAME MISSION.



United Way of the Plains



UNITED WAY
of the Plains

Dear Friends,

For over 100 years, United Way of the Plains has been connecting people who care to people who need care. You've seen our logo. You've heard our name. In 2025, we embarked on a journey to clarify our story and refresh our visual identity. **We may look different today, but our work hasn't changed.** We bring our community together to find strength and share hope. It's the way we rally to meet people's needs.

United is the way to a healthy community. It's how we improve access to nutritious food and medical services, so people lead strong, vibrant lives.

United is the way to youth opportunity. It's how we create pathways for young people to reach their potential, from early childhood education to college and career success.

United is the way to financial security. It's how we connect people to essential services, stable housing and workforce development, so every generation can build a stronger future.

United is the way to community resiliency. It's how we turn compassion into action, mobilizing volunteers and resources when disaster hits so our neighbors can recover and rebuild.

United is the way we meet the moment, adapting to tackle evolving needs. It's how we develop new, innovative solutions to complex issues and forge partnerships to ensure our community's strength.

As you explore this report, we hope you are inspired by the stories of impact that shaped 2025. These moments reflect the power of collective generosity across our region, proving that when we come together, we can build a stronger, more resilient community.

United is the way we come together so everyone can thrive.



With gratitude,

Pete Nájera
President & CEO

REFRESHED IMPACT AREAS LAUNCHING IN 2026:



HEALTHY COMMUNITY

Improving the health and well-being for all



YOUTH OPPORTUNITY

Helping young people realize their full potential



FINANCIAL SECURITY

Creating a stronger financial future for every generation



COMMUNITY RESILIENCY

Addressing urgent needs today for a better tomorrow



#1 FAVORITE CHARITY

Last year, United Way earned the **#1 SPOT ON THE CHRONICLE OF PHILANTHROPY'S LIST OF AMERICA'S FAVORITE CHARITIES**, a powerful reflection of the generosity and trust of donors nationwide. This recognition celebrates the impact made possible when a community of donors, volunteers, and partners mobilize to support our most vulnerable neighbors.



\$1 = \$2.73

DONATION WORTH OF IMPACT

When you give to United Way, your gift is amplified through partnerships, shared resources, and coordinated community action. In addition to operating direct services that add value and meet the community's most pressing needs, we also fund charitable programs.

RECORD BREAKING

1,272,511

times United Way investments in funded partners and our 15 direct services helped the people of south-central Kansas reach their potential and thrive.





ALICE IS OUR NEIGHBOR

ALICE is an acronym to define and understand the struggles of households with income above the Federal Poverty Level, but less than the cost of necessities:



ASSET LIMITED

No safety net in times of crisis



INCOME CONSTRAINED

Income falls short of covering essentials



EMPLOYED

Working, yet not earning enough

Learn more about ALICE in Sedgwick County at unitedforalice.org/county-reports/kansas.

40%

of households in Sedgwick County live below the ALICE threshold.



For too many families, the cost of living outpaces what they bring in, and public assistance is often not an option. Yet these workers perform jobs that are critical to our community: cashiers, cleaners, truck drivers, health aids, and many others. When funds run short, they are forced to make impossible choices, such as deciding between quality child care or paying the rent, filling a prescription or fixing the car. **These short-term decisions have long-term consequences not only for ALICE families, but for all of us.**

United Way's direct services help ALICE households address immediate needs while building long-term stability. When working families can afford the basics, it creates a ripple effect that strengthens our community and our local economy. **United is the way to ensure a future that builds security for all.**





OUR INVESTMENTS

Thanks to our generous community, United Way invested **\$4.4 million** last year in the work of 66 nonprofits. These funds fuel three nonprofit investment opportunities to help create a future where every person in south-central Kansas can thrive:

Promise in the Plains: Invests in grassroots organizations meeting the needs of underserved communities *(page 9)*.

Impact on the Plains: Promotes an entrepreneurial ethos in the nonprofit ecosystem to transform how complex social issues are addressed *(page 10 - 11)*.

Opportunity on the Plains: United Way's largest invest program, advancing the work of health and human service programs that meet pressing needs in the areas of education, health, financial stability and basic needs *(page 12 - 23)*.

Last year **PROMISE ON THE PLAINS**, awarded grants ranging from \$2,500 to \$10,000 to 14 nonprofits across the Wichita metropolitan region, helping amplify their impact in underserved communities.

- » **Common Ground Growers and Producers:** Delivers fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables to food deserts through a mobile farmers market.
- » **Crystal's Closet:** Provides clothing, hygiene items, baby essentials, and winter gear to families facing economic hardship.
- » **Equity Initiative:** Works to close opportunity gaps by empowering youth through programs that build life skills, strengthen academics, and provide mentorship.
- » **Fun, Fit, Life Foundation:** Empowers young people to prioritize their physical, mental, and social well-being through education, inspiration, and support.
- » **ICT Food Rescue:** Collects and redistributes surplus food to individuals and families facing food insecurity in Wichita.
- » **Kansas Birth Justice Society:** Advances reproductive justice through community care, policy advocacy, and workforce development by training doulas, providing aid to families, and promoting equitable access to maternal health care.
- » **Kansas Hispanic Education Development Foundation:** Supports Hispanic students by providing resources for post-secondary education and career readiness *(pictured left)*.

- » **La Familia Senior Community Center:** Provides nutrition services, health screenings, and education to support members, their families, and the community.
- » **Masters and Mentors Youth Enrichment Strategies:** Uses evidence-based practices to equip Kansas youth with skills in emotional regulation, critical thinking, and decision-making.
- » **Project Laundry:** Offers support and dignity to individuals facing financial challenges by helping with laundry services.
- » **Safe Streets Wichita:** Dedicated to prevention, harm reduction, mental health advocacy, and environmental justice, ensuring everyone has access to the support and tools needed for survival and stability.
- » **Salud Más Bienestar:** Empowers the Hispanic community by providing Spanish speakers with accessible health information and resources to enhance their well-being and quality of life.
- » **Shower Up Wichita:** Provides mobile showers, hygiene supplies, and personal care to those experiencing homelessness.
- » **Untamed Athletes:** Empowers underserved youth, including those involved with the justice system, through mentorship, education, and athletic training.

At last year's **IMPACT ON THE PLAINS** event, four nonprofits took the stage in a "Shark Tank"-style competition, pitching bold approaches to turn struggle into stability and hope into action. \$105,000 in grants were awarded at the end of the night to help bring these solutions to life.

FIRST PLACE: \$40,000



Charitable Pharmacy

Provides lower-cost or free prescription medications to uninsured clients to help them improve and maintain their health.

THIRD PLACE: \$20,000



GO Project: CarePortal

Leverages an online platform to connect caring neighbors to needs that keep kids safe, families stable and hope alive.

**SECOND PLACE: \$30,000
PEOPLE'S CHOICE AWARD: \$5,000**



Realidad U

Removes language barriers to unlock the potential of every student to acquire financial skills for a productive life.

FOURTH PLACE: \$10,000



Child Development Network

Expands access to affordable, high-quality early childhood education by removing financial and capacity barriers through a shared employer-employee cost model.

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR ESTEEMED COMMUNITY JUDGES:

- Sam Chandler, INTRUST Bank
- Susan DeVaughn, IMA Financial Group, Inc.
- Victor Ojeleye, Hutton
- Heather Schroeder, Downtown Wichita
- Amy Williams, Kansas Leadership Center

“It was amazing to be up there and tell Cairn Health's story. We are going to use this investment to continue growing the pharmacy. It means clients will have access to prescription medications.”

– Amber Beck,
Executive Director for Cairn Health





EDUCATION

United is the way we help children reach their potential. With an approach that spans from cradle to career, we're making sure children start school ready to learn, achieve on-grade reading levels, and graduate prepared for success in college or the workforce.

2,786

Kindergarten through third-grade students at 13 elementary schools received two new books each at the end of the school year to encourage them to practice their reading skills over the summer. Books were provided through funds raised in partnership with **CHAMPIONS FOR LITERACY**, a Memphis-based initiative, and Wichita State University basketball teams.

TURNING THE PAGE TOGETHER

Reading didn't come easy for Tatum, a third grader at Jefferson Elementary School. Like many students, she struggled with confidence as much as comprehension. Through United Way's **READ TO SUCCEED** program with Wichita Public Schools, she was paired with Jennifer Marshall, a trained volunteer reading coach. During weekly meetings, Jennifer would listen to Tatum as she read aloud, offering encouragement and helping her navigate challenges.

These weekly sessions help second and third grade students strengthen their reading skills and meet grade-level benchmarks to stay on track in school. If they continue to struggle, they'll be at four times greater risk of falling behind and dropping out of school. Last year, **438 students** had a reading coach to help them succeed.

With a supportive coach beside her, reading has shifted from a challenge into an accomplishment for Tatum, one page at a time.

United is the way we help students achieve educational milestones.





OPPORTUNITY ON THE PLAINS PARTNERS IN EDUCATION

>> KINDERGARTEN READINESS

Early Childhood Connections / Child Start

Supersized Summer Reading / Wichita Public Library Foundation

>> ON-GRADE ACHIEVEMENT

One-to-One Community Based Mentoring / Kansas Big Brothers Big Sisters Serving Sedgwick County

One-to-One Mentoring / Kansas Big Brothers Big Sisters serving Cowley County

The Pando Way 2025 / The Pando Initiative

Partnership Assuring Learning Success – PALS / Prime Fit Youth Foundation

School Year and Summer Program / Boys & Girls Clubs of South Central Kansas

>> COLLEGE & CAREER READINESS

Full-Time Substitute Career Specialist / Jobs for America's Graduates-Kansas

Juniper Fine Arts Programming / Juniper Arts Academy

Root the Power / Destination Innovation

Youth Employment Project / Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas

FUNDING BRIGHT FUTURES

Each school year, United Way of the Plains awards the **AARON JOEL SMITH MEMORIAL YOUTH VOLUNTEER SCHOLARSHIP** to three high school students who demonstrate a strong commitment to their community through volunteerism. The scholarship honors the legacy of Aaron Joel Smith, a Northeast Magnet High School student who was an active volunteer with United Way.

SPRING 2025 RECIPIENTS

- **\$25,000 Scholarship**
Zinnia Singh / Wichita East High School
- **\$15,000 Scholarship**
Austin Thieme / Sedgwick High School
- **\$10,000 Scholarship**
Omar Mousa / Wichita Northeast Magnet High School

FALL 2025 RECIPIENTS

- **\$25,000 Scholarship**
Annabella Shannon / Wichita East High School
- **\$15,000 Scholarship**
Lauren Wise / Maize South High School
- **\$10,000 Scholarship**
Hunter Steele Heckart / Mulvane High School



“Now I have the opportunity to pursue higher education. I can continue my volunteer work in college with this scholarship.”

– Zinnia Singh, Scholarship Recipient



HEALTH

United is the way to a healthy community. Our community is only as healthy as our neighbors. We're helping everyone, of all ages and abilities, lead healthier lives.

“They help us learn how to attack the disease from different areas.”

—Delia, Club Parkinson's Exercise and Wellness Program Participant



OPPORTUNITY ON THE PLAINS PARTNERS IN HEALTH

>> ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Clinic Services and Community Programming / Great Plains Diabetes Research
Dental Outreach Program / GraceMed Health Clinic
Expansion of Substance Use Disorder and Medication-Assisted Treatment for Opioid Use Disorder / Hunter Health Clinic
Medical & Employment Transportation for People with Disabilities / Cerebral Palsy Research Foundation of Kansas (CPRF)
Medical Equipment Distribution / Medical Loan Closet of Wichita
Medical Victim Assistance Program / Child Advocacy Center of Sedgwick County
Project Access / Central Plains Healthcare Partnership
Vision Care for All / Guadalupe Clinic
Wheelchair Clinic & Assistive Technology Funding / CPRF

>> ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH

Early Childhood Mental Health / Rainbows United
Expanded Community Connections / International Rescue Committee
Kidzcope / Wichita Children's Home
Mental Health Program / Breakthrough
Mental Health Services for Sexual Assault Victims / Wichita Area Sexual Assault Center
Outpatient Mental Health / Kansas Children's Service League

>> HEALTHY LIFESTYLES

Exercise and Wellness Program / Club Parkinson's
Exercise and Wellness Therapy for People with Disabilities / CPRF
Project Hope: Hygiene Essentials for Students / Simply Hygiene
Sober Active Community / The Phoenix
Strengthening Girls from Start to Finish / Girls on the Run Heart of Kansas

FINANCIAL STABILITY

United is the way we create a stronger financial future for every generation. We're helping people gain strong financial literacy skills to make money-smart decisions, develop workforce skills that enable upward mobility, and get on the path to home ownership.



163

unbanked or underbanked households in Sedgwick took a step toward greater financial stability last year by opening a safe, affordable Bank On-certified bank account or participating in a Bank On ICT education workshop (pictured left). Led by United Way, the Bank On ICT coalition brings together financial institutions, community organizations, and local government entities to expand access to trustworthy banking options, helping families avoid predatory lending services and build a stronger financial future.

MORE THAN A TAX RETURN

For many income-limited households, the tax season can feel overwhelming. Navigating the forms can be complicated and hiring a service is cost prohibitive. United Way's **FREE TAX FILING SERVICES** is removing those challenges and financial barriers by offering quality, free filing assistance through a network of partners and IRS-certified volunteers.

Last year, 145 trained tax preparers filed returns for 6,500 households, helping them claim valuable refunds and tax credits. For many, these refunds offer an opportunity to cover necessary expenses like groceries, rent, utilities, car repairs, school supplies, and medical care.

RECORD BREAKING

\$8,029,694

in tax refunds were returned to low-to-moderate income households last year.



“

Before this program, I was paying \$300 to get my taxes done.”

– Mary, Free Tax Filing Service Client



OPPORTUNITY ON THE PLAINS PARTNERS IN FINANCIAL STABILITY

>> FINANCIALLY PREPARED

LegacyWorks Youth Development Program / Legacy Ministries

>> WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Domestic Violence Employment Program / The Women's Network

Hand Up to Work / Goodwill Industries of Kansas

Seeds for Success / Catholic Charities

>> HOUSEHOLD STABILITY & ASSET BUILDING

BridgesICT / HopeNet

Guided Independent Living Assessment / Cerebral Palsy
Research Foundation of Kansas

Homeowner Support / Wichita Habitat for Humanity

Outreach Center / Angel's in the Attic *(pictured right)*

Stabilization Services / Family Promise of Greater Wichita

Winfield Housing Stability Project / Winfield Habitat for Humanity



BASIC NEEDS

United is the way we provide a social services safety net. When faced with hard times, we're helping our neighbors access the assistance needed to bounce back stronger.

60,852

free rides on City Transit were provided to veterans last year through **VETS RIDE FREE**. Made possible through a partnership between the City of Wichita, the Robert J. Dole VA Medical Center, and United Way, the program removes transportation barriers for those who served our country.



“Vets Ride Free has allowed me to get better access to the VA for my health. I have started to become more proactive in getting the help that I need. And it has made it a lot easier for me to get to the grocery store. It really has opened up the city to me and my kids.”

—Tina, a veteran who uses Vet Ride Free

OPPORTUNITY ON THE PLAINS PARTNERS IN BASIC NEEDS

>> FOOD INSECURITY

Community Food Ministry / United Methodist Open Door
Community Food Pantry / Dear Neighbor Ministries
Food Bank / The Center
Meals on Wheels / Senior Services of Wichita
Our Daily Bread / Catholic Charities

>> HOMELESS SERVICES

Emergency Overnight Shelter Services / Union Rescue Mission
Homeless Resource Center / United Methodist Open Door
The Inn / HumanKind Ministries
St. Anthony Family Shelter / Catholic Charities
Youth Anti-Homeless Programs / Wichita Children's Home

>> RENT/UTILITY ASSISTANCE

Emergency Services / Family Promise of Greater Wichita
Homeless Prevention / Center of Hope
Rent/Utility Assistance & Case Management / Dear Neighbor Ministries

>> PROTECTION FROM ABUSE

Anti-Human Trafficking Prevention & Advocacy Services / ICT SOS
Domestic Violence Shelter and Services / Wichita Family Crisis Center
Harbor House / Catholic Charities
Residential Emergency Shelter / Wichita Children's Home
Residential Safer Future Program / Youth Horizons
Support Services for Victims of Domestic Violence / StepStone
Supportive Services for Sexual Assault Victims / Wichita Area Sexual Assault Center

“We are in it for the long haul with families. We continue to work until they are stable.”

— Dawn Epp, Executive Director for Family Promise of Greater Wichita



The Coalition serves as the local response network for homelessness, bringing partners together around a shared goal: ensuring everyone has a safe place to call home. Led by United Way and guided by a 16-member board representing service providers, local government, businesses, and individuals with lived experience, the Coalition aligns housing, support services, and community resources to help our unhoused neighbors move toward stability.

Supported in part by a **\$3 million grant** from the federal Continuum of Care program, this work is carried out by 24 member agencies to make homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring. Through coordinated entry, housing navigation, data-informed decision-making, and strategic funding, the Coalition is helping Sedgwick County move toward functional zero homelessness, when more people are housed than are becoming homeless.

OUR IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS



1,360

individuals exited homelessness to positive housing outcomes



51

average days homeless. *Nationally, people were homeless for an average of 176 days.*



82%

people housed by the Coalition keep their housing two years after support ends. *U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) considers a high-performing community to be 85% of people.*



162

veterans were housed as part of **Homes for Heroes**, a collaboration with the City of Wichita, Robert J. Dole VA Medical Center, and United Way to achieve functional zero homelessness for veterans.



5,082

individuals were served by Coalition members through emergency shelter, transitional housing, and housing services.

INTRODUCING NEXTenant

For those experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity, keys are the tangible representation of stability and hope. Often though, many individuals face barriers to securing housing – substance use, mental health conditions, criminal history, or a poor rental history. To help bridge this gap, United Way launched NEXTenant. This free, online platform connects property managers with renters who are ready to take the next step toward stable housing. Case managers and housing navigators come alongside tenants to ensure their stability and success. This support reduces risk and potential turnover for property managers. In the first five months of the program, 24 property managers joined NEXTenant, helping 10 individuals secure keys to a fresh start and brighter future.





United Way's **HOUSING NAVIGATION** program was honored with a 2025 Innovation Award from the Wichita Business Journal.

Created to address the complex barriers faced by our unhoused neighbors, the program provides compassionate, one-on-one support to quickly match individuals with resources to meet their unique needs. For many, this connection becomes the first step toward stable housing, lasting security, and restored hope. Each act of support moves Wichita closer to a future where homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring.

Jillian Castaneda, United Way of the Plains Housing Navigator, talks with a client at an encampment.

177

individuals experiencing homelessness were connected with a housing navigator last year.

MORE THAN A HOUSE



"This afternoon we helped a couple and their two dogs move into a home after being unsheltered for the past two years. It's been a tough road, especially for her. She's been in and out of the hospital lately dealing with medical issues and heat exhaustion.

When she walked through the front door, she started to cry. One of the first things she said was, 'I can't wait to take a shower.'

Then she picked up the phone to call her son. She's been trying to reconnect with him, and now that she finally has a place of her own, she invited him over to see it. She told us she's excited to make him tamales in her new kitchen this weekend.

Housing is more than just a roof. When you don't have to spend every day in survival mode, there's space for everything else, like cooking for someone you love, taking a shower, and just feeling human again."

– Jen McGill, United Way of the Plains Coordinated Entry System Manager



MAKING CONNECTIONS

United is the way we connect our neighbors and nonprofits to resources that help them thrive. Through our direct services, we're addressing gaps in the social services landscape and helping our community access vital information, tangible goods, and manpower.

150,000+

times Kansans called on **211 INFORMATION AND REFERRAL SERVICE** for trusted guidance to navigate life's hardest questions. From access to food and shelter to help paying utilities and filing taxes, 211 Resource Navigators connected our neighbors to the support they needed to move forward with hope. Through a new partnership with AARP, 211 expanded assistance targeted for caregivers, ensuring they can balance life's demands successfully.

RECORD BREAKING
\$4.4 MILLION

worth of donated goods were distributed free of charge to 259 nonprofits through the **GIVE ITEMS OF VALUE WAREHOUSE**. From everyday essentials to critical supplies, these items helped agencies stretch their budgets and better serve their clients. Behind the scenes, 475 volunteers sorted and organized donations from 60 companies. >>

<< 126 volunteers rolled up their sleeves for the second annual **DAY OF ACTION** on June 20. Across 11 local nonprofits, they landscaped, organized, assembled kits, and tackled critical projects. In just one day, their generosity and hard work saved partner organizations over \$17,500, financial resources that can now be redirected to serving their clients. The event was just one way the United Way **VOLUNTEER CENTER** recruited 6,769 compassionate community members to help agencies advance their missions.

UNITED AGAINST HUNGER



United is the way we overcome challenges and care for one another. When the government shutdown disrupted Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, we harnessed the caring power of our community to help feed local families.

Over 100 cars participated in a one-day, drive-through flash food drive. Nearly **four tons** of non-perishable food items were collected for local food pantries experiencing increased demand, ensuring our neighbors had access to food during the government shutdown.

RAPID RESPONSE FUNDING

United Way quickly mobilized funding to help 20 local food pantries meet rising demand caused by SNAP disruptions. These trusted partners, selected for their strong capacity and deep reach into high-need communities, were better equipped to keep shelves stocked and families supported during this critical time. This investment built on United Way's year-round commitment of more than \$310,000 to address food insecurity across south-central Kansas, ensuring neighbors facing uncertainty continue to have access to the food they need.

Andover United Methodist Church
Angels in the Attic
Anthony Ministerial Association
Augusta Community Caring Center
Catholic Charities, Diocese of Wichita
The Center
Christian Food Bank of Pratt
Dear Neighbor Ministries
First Baptist Church Mulvane – Gleanings
His Helping Hands, Inc
Kingman Area Ministries Inc Food Bank
Living Waters Ministry

Medicine Lodge Methodist Church
Norwich Methodist Church
Rolling Hills Community Church
The Salvation Army South Central Area Command
Sunflower Outreach Services:
Joseph's Storehouse
United Methodist Open Door
Wellington Free Will Baptist Church
Winfield Food Pantry

Food supplies at United Methodist Open Door (pictured right) were running low when United Way surprised them with rapid response funding.





The **UNITED WAY TOCQUEVILLE SOCIETY** is a national initiative inspired by Alexis de Tocqueville, who traveled the United States extensively in 1831 and observed the strong support for public welfare among citizens. We are grateful to local members who support United Way of the Plains' mission to create pathways to opportunity for all with an annual investment of \$10,000 or more.

As part of the 2025 Tocqueville Society Annual Dinner, four philanthropic leaders were honored for paving the way for transformative change in our community.



GENE & YOLANDA CAMARENA
Spirit of Service Award



CHARLIE & MARLA CHANDLER
Spirit of Giving Award



TOM DOCKING (POSTHUMOUS)
Accepted by Jill Docking
Spirit of Service Award



DAVID & BARBARA ROLPH
Spirit of Service Award

Transformational Partners

Gifts of \$100,000+

Helen and Russ Meyer

Visionary Partners

Gifts of \$50,000 - \$99,999

Barbara and David Rolph

Groundbreaking Partners

Gifts of \$25,000 - \$49,999

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Marla and Charlie Chandler
Hannah and Rich Kerschen
Laura and Philip Knight

Liz and Charles Koch
Judy and Doug Ledbetter
Kriya and Terry Shortt
Anonymous



Accelerating Partners

Gifts of \$10,000 - \$24,999

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United Way of the Plains makes every effort to accurately acknowledge our donors and supporters. If an error in recognition has occurred, please contact Kara Hunt, Associate Vice President of Philanthropy, at (316) 267-1321 ext. 4213 or khunt@unitedwayplains.org.

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