

# Working to **END** Homelessness

## Employment Program Models for People Experiencing Homelessness: Different approaches to program structure

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### Working to End Homelessness Series

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Most individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness want to work and a growing number of service providers and policymakers have taken notice. Although choosing the right employment program model can seem like a daunting task, research and wisdom from the field shows that multiple models have proven effective or promising in attaching the most disadvantaged jobseekers to work and helping them advance to employment options that meet their long-term needs and interests. Additionally, these models can be helpful in building upon existing skills or developing new skills necessary to enter and succeed in employment today. This best practice brief highlights what is known about these employment approaches to attachment and advancement, covering each model's purpose, elements, principles, funding, and research evidence, with examples from the field. Featured models include:

- [Transitional Jobs](#)
- [Individualized Placement Support](#)
- [Alternative Staffing](#)
- [Customized Employment](#)
- [Contextualized Basic Adult Education](#)
- [Adult Education Bridge Programs](#)
- [Sector-Based Training](#)

The National Transitional Jobs Network (NTJN) launched the **Working to End Homelessness Initiative** (WEH) in 2011, with support from the Butler Family Fund, to shine a spotlight on the important role of employment solutions in addressing homelessness and to identify and disseminate promising employment practices. To achieve these ends, the NTJN conducted a review of literature, met with key stakeholders and experts, and convened a national community of practice focused on employment programming for people experiencing homelessness. The community of practice includes 22 experienced workforce development professionals in 16 states that operate a diverse set of employment models including transitional jobs, supported employment, social enterprise, work readiness training, and alternative staffing and serve a diversity of populations experiencing homelessness. Throughout the course of a year professionals have identified best practices, lifted up employment solutions to serving the population, and highlighted policy and systems challenges to their work.

## “Attachment to Work” Approaches to Addressing Homelessness

Because people experiencing homelessness form a [diverse group](#), a variety of evidence-based and promising approaches have emerged to assist transitions into employment for different subpopulations, including Transitional Jobs (TJ), Individualized Placement Support (IPS), Alternative Staffing, and Customized Employment (CE). Transitional Jobs takes a stepping-stone approach utilizing time-limited wage-paid employment to build experience. Individualized Placement Support engages participants in rapid entry to employment in the competitive labor market integrated with supportive services and one-on-one job coaching for an indefinite period. Customized Employment and Alternative Staffing negotiate the description or duration of a job to meet both jobseeker and employer needs. The following outlines these approaches that are at the forefront of supporting attachment to work for individuals at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

### Transitional Jobs

The Transitional Jobs (TJ) model is designed to overcome employment obstacles by using time-limited, wage-paying jobs that combine real work, skill development, and supportive services in order to transition participants successfully into the labor market. TJ provides stability and a stepping stone to unsubsidized employment for people facing barriers to employment including those at risk of or experiencing homelessness, people residing in public housing, individuals leaving incarceration, and families participating in public benefit systems such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).<sup>1</sup> Core program elements of the Transitional Jobs model include the following:<sup>2</sup>

#### Further Resources

- [Transitional Jobs Design Elements](#)
- [National Transitional Jobs Network](#)
- [Funding Transitional Jobs Programs](#)
- [Ensuring the TJ is a Developmental Experience](#)

- orientation & assessment to identify participant strengths and barriers,
- job readiness and life skills classes to support successful workplace behaviors,
- employment-focused case management to coordinate services and manage barriers,
- a Transitional Job – a real, wage-paying work experience to learn and practice work-readiness lessons,
- unsubsidized job placement & retention services to help participants enter and stay in employment, and
- linkages to education and training to build basic skills and support career advancement in quality jobs.

The TJ experience may be structured in a number of ways including scattered employment sites, work crews, and in-house placements which are commonly provided at a social enterprise business. Transitional Jobs placements may be with for-profit, non-profit or public employers. Real work experience is combined with orientation and assessment, job readiness and life skills

classes, case management, job placement and retention services, wrap-around supports, and linkages to education and training.<sup>3</sup> The Transitional Jobs model holds that the best way to learn hard and soft skills valued by employers is through real work experience. Lessons from evaluations of Transitional Jobs programs suggest that programs must implement the TJ as a developmental learning experience. When the TJ model is implemented developmentally, participants may learn the daily patterns, tasks, and relationships of a real job, and have an opportunity to learn and practice successful workplace behaviors. Participants earn income, acquire a work history and reference, and gain access to benefits such as Unemployment Insurance, Social Security, and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).<sup>4</sup>

#### **Keys to a Developmental TJ Experience –**

How is a Transitional Job different/more than temporary subsidized employment? Transitional Jobs are designed to ensure that the workplace is a learning environment in which participants acquire successful work-readiness skills by practicing them in a real job—learning to work by working.

- Provide transitional employment that represents real work experience
- Foster strong communication and feedback on progress and work-readiness
- Be flexible and allow for mistakes
- Provide opportunities for peer and social support

The Transitional Jobs model has many demonstrable benefits for hard-to-employ individuals and has demonstrated positive results in a number of random assignment studies, a longitudinal study, and multi-method evaluations.<sup>5</sup> Notably, research shows that even during very weak labor markets TJ keeps individuals employed, and contributes to lowering recidivism, reducing public benefits receipt, and improving the lives of children.<sup>6</sup>

Based on some findings showing the employment effects fading over time the model has evolved to include more robust job placement and retention activities, to make the TJ experience more developmental, and new innovations are being tested including linkages to job training; stepped TJ that can include graduated responsibility, movement from in-house to scattered-site placements, and transitions from fully-subsidized to partially-subsidized wages; monetary incentives like income supports and retention bonuses; and enhanced peer support and mentoring.

No single source of funding exists to support the implementation of Transitional Jobs programs. Most TJ providers cobble together a myriad of local, state, and federal funds to support different parts of the program. Transitional Jobs providers may utilize funding through the Second Chance Act to serve individuals exiting incarceration, the Workforce Investment Act for serving youth and adults, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, the Community Development Block Grant, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly food stamps) Employment & Training funds, and many other blends of public and private funding.<sup>7</sup> Some of these sources of funding support the payment of wages while others do not. TJ programs that operate social enterprises typically leverage the earned income from the sale of products or services to pay for all or part of participant wages.

### Program Example – The Doe Fund’s Ready, Willing & Able Program

Ready, Willing & Able offers 6 to 12 months of paid transitional work experience in positions such as street cleaning, security, and culinary arts to transitional housing residents at their Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Philadelphia locations, as well as parolees on a non-residential basis. All participants begin the program by deploying as the “men in blue,” cleaning streets and parks, and removing graffiti while undertaking job readiness and adult education courses. They gain regular feedback and support from their case managers and supervisors (who are themselves graduates), learn soft skills from real work experience, and typically transition to sector-based training and skilled work in fields like energy efficient building maintenance, pest control, and commercial driving. Ready, Willing & Able participants work a minimum of 30 hours a week and earn \$7.40 to \$8.15 an hour with access to a range of employment and supportive service options. On average, graduates earn \$10.31 an hour and are 60 percent less likely to be convicted of a felony within three years than non-participants as of 2010. The Doe Fund is funded in part by the U.S. Department of Labor, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, New York State’s Department of Correctional Services, New York City’s Departments of Probation, Homeless Services, and Housing Preservation, private donations, and social enterprise revenues.

Click [here](#) to learn more about Ready, Willing & Able.

## Supported Employment

Individualized Placement Support (IPS) is the standard evidence-based model of supported employment for helping individuals with a mental illness find and keep a regular paid job in the competitive labor market with at least a minimum wage.<sup>8</sup> IPS holds that the best way to support self-sufficiency for people with a mental illness is to support rapid entry to the competitive labor market integrated with support services as soon as the participant feels ready.

### Further Resources

- [SAMHSA Supported Employment Toolkit](#)
- [IPS Fidelity Scale](#)
- [Implementing Supported Employment as an Evidence-Based Practice](#)
- [Ending Chronic Homelessness through Employment and Housing](#)

Primarily funded by Medicaid and other blends of public and private funds, the IPS model has been tested through three quasi-experimental studies, six randomized controlled trials, and numerous other studies, evidencing strong placement, retention, and cost-effectiveness.<sup>9</sup> The research isolates what works about IPS and is best characterized through seven principles

that providers adhere to through a fidelity scale.<sup>10</sup> The model also yields strong evidence for effectiveness in serving individuals with substance use issues experiencing homelessness.<sup>11</sup>

**Principles of Individualized Placement Support** – The principles of IPS are founded in a synthesis of supported employment evaluation studies and isolate the core components found essential to successful employment outcomes.

- Commitment to regular employment in the competitive labor market
- Eligibility based on consumer choice rather than assessment
- Rapid job search rather than work-readiness training
- Placements individualized to participant preference and strengths
- Indefinite and individualized follow-along supports
- Integration with mental health and other supportive services
- Benefits counseling to secure income and overcome disincentives

Research in supported employment finds that there is not a significant difference in employment outcomes for individuals with different levels and types of mental health issues and those participants tend to achieve their position of choice.<sup>12</sup> As such, IPS providers keep an open door to rapidly serving individuals in need when participants consider themselves ready. Once the participant is interested in employment, providers engage in the following:<sup>13</sup>

- work one-on-one with the participant to assess interests, barriers, and strengths,
- develop an individualized employment plan,
- offer counseling with regard to public benefits, since the potential loss of benefits upon getting a job can sometimes serve as a disincentive to seeking employment,
- support the participant's rapid job search and placement in paid community-based positions they desire,
- offer ongoing vocational supports such as one-on-one job coaching and on-the-job training and credentialing,
- integrate employment assistance with mental health treatment and other supportive services to better help the individual work through employment barriers, and
- continually reassess the client and provide additional support or re-placement as new barriers emerge.

For individuals experiencing chronic homelessness, lessons from the U.S. DOL-HUD Initiative to End Chronic Homelessness through Employment and Housing suggest that employment should become a top priority after the participant has satisfied basic needs such as housing and has expressed interest in employment. Once individuals are stably housed, practitioners may engage housing residents to receive employment and other services, fostering bridges to self-sufficiency, and facilitating an arena for mental health practitioners and other service providers to help individuals work through personal barriers on the job.<sup>14</sup>

### Program Example – Employment Access Center at Central City Concern

At Central City Concern's Employment Access Center (EAC) in Portland, Oregon, practitioners provide IPS supported employment services to individuals experiencing homelessness with primary addiction disorders and felony convictions to help them permanently transition out of homelessness and rapidly enter employment in sectors such as construction, business and professional services, hospitality and tourism, and retail. Participants benefit from the confidence and empowerment that comes from real work and from personalized support through an integrated service team of supportive housing case managers, addiction treatment counselors, and employment specialists with a 1:25 caseload ratio. Of the 319 clients served by the supported employment programs in 2010, 71 percent of the 227 participants were placed in at least one job, 53 percent of participants were employed full-time, and 77 percent of participants who found a job were still employed three quarters later. The average hourly wage was \$9.96, although one program achieved an average wage of \$13.46 and nationally placed in the top 9th percentile for IPS fidelity. Central City Concern's Employment Access Center is funded in part by the Community Development Block Grant, the City of Portland, and private donations.

Click [here](#) to learn more about Central City Concern.

## Alternative Staffing

Alternative Staffing Organizations (ASOs) broker temporary entry-level job placements for individuals with diverse barriers to employment including individuals at risk of or experiencing homelessness, individuals with criminal backgrounds, and individuals with a disabling condition. Unlike conventional staffing firms, ASOs hold a dual client perspective. ASOs aim to develop a quality ready-to-work labor force for employers while helping jobseekers learn workplace skills, build experience and confidence, earn an employment record, and leverage temporary placements to permanent jobs.<sup>15</sup>

ASOs support participants through work-readiness training, case management, and the provision of supportive services including transportation, job coaching, and assistance transitioning from temporary to permanent positions. On the employer side, ASOs field the costs of screening, hiring, payroll processing, and layoffs on a competitive fee-for-service basis. Research shows that employers served by both conventional and alternative staffing

### Further Resources

- [Introduction to Alternative Staffing](#)
- [Alternative Staffing Alliance](#)
- [Brokering Up](#)



organizations prefer the supervision and employee support that ASOs offer to regular approaches.<sup>16</sup> Based on lessons from the field, experts find that successful ASOs:<sup>17</sup>

- are led by versatile, highly-motivated managers,
- are backed by strong, committed organizational sponsors that bring local business and funding opportunities,
- deliver a wide range of pre- and post-placement jobseeker support services, and
- are flexible in responding to market changes and opportunities.

This supportive and competitive approach allows a majority of ASOs to achieve significant financial self-sustainability through strong parent-organization contacts and competitive fee revenue. For example, one survey of the field found that ASOs tend to cover at least 75 percent of operating costs through fee revenues, with the remainder gained through public and private grants, often facilitated by the parent organization.<sup>18</sup>

Likewise, ASOs' standard business practices and exposure to competitive market forces show promise in reacting more flexibly to labor market shifts and making a competitive business case for permanent hiring through no charge "temp-to-hire" transitions. One Alternative Staffing demonstration shows that across four ASOs, about 16 to 41 percent of temporary workers transitioned to permanent positions with the same employer. Furthermore, 76 percent of the participants said that they valued the flexibility of temporary work, some of whom were co-enrolled in a training program. This suggests that Alternative Staffing may also serve as a bridge between entry-level work and career advancement opportunities.<sup>19</sup>

#### **Program Example – Chrysalis Staffing at Chrysalis Enterprises**

Chrysalis Staffing at Chrysalis Enterprises is an alternative staffing agency in Los Angeles, California. Chrysalis helps individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness remove barriers to employment and gain the tools and support needed to find and retain employment through readiness training, job planning, and a temporary staffing position (or position in a social enterprise). Participants are encouraged to participate in all comprehensive supports as they search for work including mentoring, job planning, job-readiness and life-skill classes, communication services, work tools, and retention support groups. Participants then enter temporary staffing positions in property maintenance, light industrial, hospitality, warehousing, construction, janitorial and special event jobs. Through these placements, participants acquire real-world skills, increased self-confidence, a recent work history, references, and the soft skills needed to secure permanent employment. In 2010, Chrysalis Enterprises contributed to \$2.5 million in wages earned in over 218,000 hours of employment for 450 participants. Chrysalis Enterprises is funded in part by social enterprise and fee-for-service revenues, private donations, and government grants.

Click [here](#) to learn more about Chrysalis Enterprises.

## Customized Employment

Customized Employment (CE) is a person-centered process for opening employment opportunities by tailoring job positions to the participant's strengths and abilities that meet an employer's needs.<sup>20</sup> No single employment strategy works for all jobseekers and individuals with disabling conditions, older adults, and individuals leaving incarceration may benefit from customized options and entrepreneurial opportunities to meet their needs and preferences. With this in mind, CE programs adhere to the following principles:<sup>21</sup>

### Further Resources

- [Housing and Urban Development Customization Lecture](#)
- [Linking Customized Employment with Supportive Housing](#)
- [Self Employment and Social Enterprise Planning](#)

- help jobseekers and the employer negotiate employment
- customize the job placement to meet both participant and employer needs
- offer person-centered services
- help participants take the lead in placements and customization options
- foster exploration and discovery of employment options
- provide a range of supportive services such as benefits counseling
- seek customized opportunities with potential for advancement

The resulting job is a match between employer needs and the jobseeker's assessed strengths, challenges, interests, and goals. CE can open employment opportunities through a number of practices including job-carving, job-sharing, job negotiation, and Self Employment:<sup>22</sup>

- *Job-carving* redefines a job position, limiting tasks to those which meet the assessed strengths and interests of the participant while meeting the needs of the employer.
- *Job-sharing* divides the tasks of a full job position among multiple participants according to their complementary strengths and interests, thus meeting the full demands of the employer.
- *Job negotiation* restructures a full position to meet the individual needs of the participant while still meeting employer demand.
- *Self Employment* is a CE strategy that empowers participants to develop a microenterprise within or outside of a larger business.<sup>23</sup>

Originally developed for individuals with disabling conditions, Customized Employment is typically funded through Medicaid, the Social Security Administration's Ticket-to-Work program, the Workforce Investment Act, and grants through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).<sup>24</sup> Numerous case studies show the promise of customized employment in serving many other disadvantaged jobseekers as well.<sup>25</sup> Although research is still underway, experts from the U.S. DOL-HUD Initiative to End Chronic Homelessness through Employment and Housing suggest that practitioners use customized employment when other approaches fail. CE may do especially well in helping permanent supportive housing residents achieve community-based employment. For example, the Customized Employment Program (CEP) in Portland, Oregon increased the self-sufficiency of individuals with great limitations.<sup>26</sup>



**Self Employment** is a form of CE that allows recipients of Social Security Insurance or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSI/SSDI) to maintain benefits while earning additional income. Under the *Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS)*, participants may develop a microenterprise business in the marketplace or within a regular business. Participants work with a Benefits Planning Assistance Outreach officer (BPAO) at a One-Stop Career Center to undergo benefits counseling, determine strengths and interests, develop a business plan, make a rental arrangement with a business if desired, and attain the training and planning services needed from the One-Stop, state Vocational Rehabilitation agency, and a certified public accountant.

## Taking the Next Step: Career advancement strategies

The employment approaches described earlier can successfully help people enter work for perhaps the first time, but these are often the first step in their employment trajectory. Once individuals have shown themselves and employers they can succeed in the workplace, and as other facets of their situation stabilize, they may want to explore a next stage of employment and career preparation. Additionally, some individuals at risk of or experiencing homelessness may have existing education or skills that could be leveraged and re-tooled to support entry into employment in a different job sector. Advancement in full-time work, increased wages, and access to worker benefits such as health insurance and paid time off are critical in helping support individuals on a pathway toward economic security. Because income rises with education and training, career advancement strategies that link individuals to college education or sectoral skills training are often seen as the next step in workforce development after people achieve basic skills, stability and success in the labor market.<sup>27</sup>

While some of these strategies have not been implemented specifically for individuals experiencing homelessness, partnerships and bridges between continuing education and training and the aforementioned models may produce meaningful on-ramps to career advancement. The following outlines evidence-based models for bridging the educational and skill divide – strategies that may prove the next step in workforce solutions to homelessness.

### Contextualized Basic Adult Education

Contextualized instruction and curriculum development is a practice in the field of adult literacy and adult basic education that involves designing academic skills lessons using illustrations and materials that are relevant in the context of an adult learner's interests, employment goals, and everyday life. Learner confidence and persistence may increase when literacy and numeracy instruction is relevant to learners' practical goals, and when students are given the opportunity to apply what they learn.<sup>28</sup>

Funded under Title II of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and other blends of public and private funds, contextualized curricula and instruction are applied to employment using common work activities and materials found in the workplace to design reading and math lessons. For example, lessons contextualized to a warehouse workplace could include lessons for calculating volume using shipping box dimensions or reading lessons using forklift operating instructions.<sup>29</sup>

#### Further Resources

- [Presentation on Contextualization](#)
- [I-BEST Learning Resources](#)

As originally developed for on-site workplace English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction for English language learners, lessons contextualized with workplace activities and materials have shown significantly positive results. For example, a rigorous evaluation of the Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Program (I-BEST) in Washington State shows that participants scored significantly higher on the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) basic skills test than the control group, and were much more likely to earn college credits and continue on to the second year.<sup>30</sup> There may be particular promise, based on some early pilots, in using contextualized instruction in conjunction with Transitional Jobs to link permanent supportive housing residents with green jobs sector-based training. Here TJ establishes the workplace as an experiential learning environment that can reinforce classroom instruction in basic skills as well as work-readiness. Early results show positive educational impacts on nearly all measures with promising job placement outcomes.

## Adult Education Bridge Programs

Jobs that require at least some postsecondary education are expected to grow in the next decade, however many low-skilled jobseekers lack the basic reading and math skills needed to access post-secondary education and training programs. One innovative way to link the hardest to employ to a training program is by enrolling them in a bridge program. Bridge programs connect participants to post-secondary education and training programs by equipping them with basic academic and English language skills. Bridge programs are condensed to make learning as efficient as possible and flexibly scheduled to meet individual needs. In Illinois, partners in the [Shifting Gears](#) project funded by the Joyce Foundation adopted a common definition and core mandated components of a bridge program, which include:<sup>31</sup>

#### Further Resources

- [Bridge Program Practices and National Examples](#)
- [Setting Up Success in Developmental Education](#)
- [Beyond Basic Skills](#)

- *Contextualized instruction* that integrates basic reading, math, and language skills and industry/occupation knowledge.

- *Career development* that includes career exploration, career planning within a career area, and understanding the world of work.
- *Transition services* such as academic advising, tutoring, coaching, and supportive services to provide students with the information and assistance they need to successfully navigate the process of moving from adult education or remedial coursework to credit or occupational programs.

While research is still underway across the nation, program evaluations such as the Illinois Adult Education Bridge Evaluation suggest that bridge programs show promise in scaffolding prior knowledge to rapidly build on new learning, and in helping participant transition to higher education and training through on-site career exploration, planning, mentorship, and supportive services.<sup>32</sup> This strategy may prove useful for helping individuals experiencing homelessness manage and surmount educational barriers to career advancement. Bridge programs are funded through a variety of sources, although many are provided through state support of local community college initiatives.<sup>33</sup>

## Sector-Based Training

Sector-based training is a strategy for helping participants increase employment and earnings potential. Sector strategies engage multiple employers and other industry leaders in the development of industry-specific training programs linked to employment opportunities and workforce needs in a sector. The approach offers participants education and hands-on training to match in-demand job openings in a specific occupation or industry sector.<sup>34</sup>

### Further Resources

- [Overview of Sector Initiatives](#)
- [Sectoral Funding Collaboratives](#)

Leaders in the field target a wide range of industries, including manufacturing, healthcare, information technology, construction, hospitality, telecommunications, food production, child care, temporary staffing, printing, and many more. A focus on specific industries, with their common occupations and skill requirements, allows sector initiatives to develop greater understanding of workers and employers in the field, and develop regional partnerships to obtain important input and buy-in, mobilize resources, and pool public and private funding from local and regional stakeholders. To yield the best value from a sector initiative, partnering providers should:<sup>35</sup>

- focus on customizing solutions for employers in a specific industry over a sustained time period,
- strengthen economic growth, industry competitiveness, and middle-class jobs by creating pathways to targeted industries,
- draw on the knowledge of local workforce intermediaries to facilitate stakeholders and roll out sector workforce solutions, and
- advance systems change that achieves benefits for the industry, workers, and community.

While there is no research on sector-based training approaches specifically for individuals experiencing homelessness, seven percent of participants in Public/Private Ventures' Sectoral Employment Impact Study experienced homelessness before entering the training program. Participants in sector training experienced significant wage increases compared to the control group according to this study. In addition, a number of practitioners report success offering sector-based training courses and in-house on-the-job training as core elements of their employment programs.<sup>36</sup>

## Conclusion

As evidenced throughout this guide, numerous models and strategies have emerged to meet the growing demand for workforce solutions to homelessness. Future investment in workforce development and homelessness systems should advance employment approaches to preventing and ending homelessness through further program implementation, evaluation and program dollars for promising “attachment to work” models, career advancement strategies, and meaningful bridges between these approaches. **Most individuals experiencing homelessness want to work – investment in these and other promising employment approaches to homelessness is a worthwhile answer.**

For more information please contact the [National Transitional Jobs Network](#). Our other briefs in the [Working to End Homelessness: Best Practice Series](#) include:

- [Service Delivery Principles and Techniques](#): Helping people experiencing homelessness engage in services and succeed in employment
- [Populations Experiencing Homelessness](#): Diverse barriers to employment and how to address them
- [Employment Program Components](#): Considerations for designing programming for people experiencing homelessness

The National Transitional Jobs Network (NTJN) is a coalition of city, state, and federal policy makers; community workforce organizations; anti-poverty nonprofit service providers and advocacy organizations committed to advancing and strengthening Transitional Jobs programs around the country so that people with barriers to employment can gain success in the workplace and improve their economic lives and the economic conditions of their communities. The NTJN supports a constituency of over 5,000 active members and stakeholders across the country.

The NTJN is a project of Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights.



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