



State of Suffolk 2025

June 2026

 mind Suffolk

State of Suffolk 2025

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If you would like to know more about the emotional needs and our approach at Suffolk Mind, [please click here...](#)

Introduction

In 2025, we gathered **1301** responses from those living in Suffolk.



Of these responses, **two fifths** of respondents are experiencing what we consider to be good wellbeing.

In 2025, the best met needs for Suffolk respondents were **Privacy**, **Close Relationships** and **Emotional Connection**.



The less met needs of the year were **Sleep**, **Movement** and **Community**.

This follows the general trend over recent years.

There is a **20%** increase in average ENA scores from the 2024 to 2025 data*. The biggest difference in needs are seen with...



Community has increased by **36%** on average

Meaning & Purpose has increased by **33%**, on average

This is encouraging as both these needs saw the biggest decline in 2024.

This State of Suffolk report explores how hobbies and interests, community involvement and time outdoors in nature can support good mental wellbeing. It also considers how incorporating these elements into our lives could help people better fulfil the needs that we are at risk of not meeting: **Sleep, Movement & Community**.

**Although there were half as many responses in 2025 compared to 2024*

Hobbies and Interests

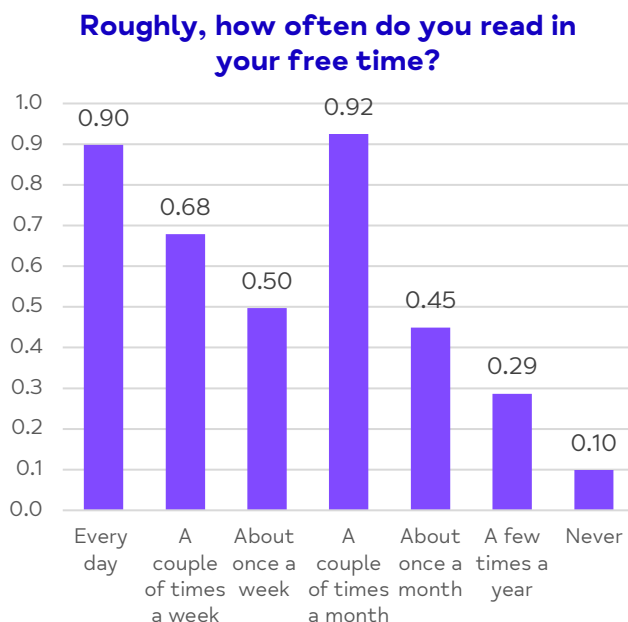
Hobbies can support our emotional and physical needs in various ways. Two thirds of those finding their 'Hobbies & Interests' a supporting factor to meeting one of their emotional or physical needs are experiencing good wellbeing.



Reading and Mental Health:

We have been asking respondents about their reading habits to see whether this can be associated with how well people are meeting their emotional needs. The regularity, time spent reading and the reading material all have interesting connections with our mental wellbeing.

Our data shows that there is a strong link between those who read regularly and have good mental health. In 2025, the results show that those reading regularly have a higher average Emotional Need Audit (ENA) score which means that they are in good wellbeing. This contrasts to those who never or rarely read where they have the lowest average ENA score out of all other reading categories (see Graph 1).



Graph 1: Average ENA over reading regularity

The average ENA score range is between -3 to +3 (the higher score, the better)

Notably, those reading a couple of times a month and those reading (nearly) every day are meeting their needs better than other reading categories. It is intriguing to see that those reading a couple of times a month have the highest wellbeing score. However, there is a low response rate from this category (58 responses) which can make this finding less valid.

If we ignore this outlier, the overall pattern shows that as **reading frequency decreases, people are less likely to meet their emotional and physical needs.**

It is unclear whether those who are meeting their needs well, are more likely to read or those who read are more likely to be in good wellbeing. Although, it is good to consider ways that we can improve our mental health – with reading being a key example of an activity that can encompass a variety of our emotional and physical needs positively.

Hobbies and Interests

Reading genre (795 responses)

Even the reading genre has an interesting association on how well we are meeting our needs. Those reading a mixture of fiction and non-fiction are the most well. Perhaps, this reiterates the idea that reading a range of reading material can support our brain in different ways. For example, fiction books may help us to expand our imagination and develop empathy, supporting our need for Emotional Connection. Imagination is also one of our innate resources that can help us solve problems, be creative, and consider possible courses of action. Additionally, reading non-fiction can widen our perspective and help us think critically about the world. For those reading just one genre, those who only read non-fiction are more well than those who only read fiction.

“Reading helps me stay positive and escape reality”

Time spent reading (1045 responses)

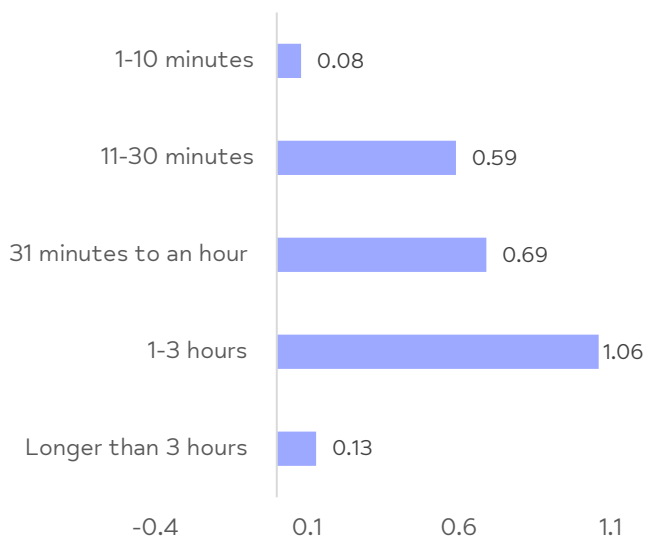
Results from respondents’ time spent reading and our emotional need data are varied. The general trend of the data this year shows that those who are reading for the shortest amount of time (1-10 minutes) are meeting their needs the least well, where just over a quarter of respondents are in good wellbeing. Those reading for 1-3 hours are the most well – 59% are in good wellbeing. Perhaps, those having the time to read for longer have more time for themselves to do things they enjoy.



How much time people have for reading may depend on their employment status. For example, 61% of those who are retired are reading every day. This is notably lower for those in full time work at 19%.

Additionally, retired respondents are also reading for longer with 33% of those reading for around 1-3 hours compared to only 15% of those in full time work. Even for those in work, setting aside time for yourself is important in helping meet the needs for Privacy, Meaning & Purpose and Control.

When you do read, roughly how long do you read for?



Graph 2: Average ENA over time spent reading

"I read a lot which distracts me and enables privacy and escapism"

Hobbies and Interests

Reading and our Emotional Needs

Reading can give us some time for ourselves which can be linked to our need for Privacy. For those reading daily, **81%** of respondents are feeling that they can obtain privacy when they need to. Furthermore, they are twice as likely to be meeting the need for Privacy than those who never read. We can also gain a sense of achievement when we are reading, for example when we finish a book or take part in a reading challenge. Our data shows that **39%** of those reading more than once a month reported that their hobbies and interests were a supporting factor for meeting the need for Achievement.

Those reading daily are meeting every individual emotional need better than those who never engage in reading. Interestingly, the biggest differences between these two groups appear in the needs for Food and Drink, Close Relationships and Community. Although reading is often seen as a solo activity, it can still support our social needs, for example through book clubs or conversations about reading with friends that can help build a sense of community.

Does reading before bed help the quality of our sleep?

Sleep is often the lowest met need, on average. With **only one third of 2025 respondents feeling rested after they sleep**. Using screens, exercising and eating right before bed can significantly disrupt our sleep quality. Research has shown that we can improve our sleep by doing something relaxing before bedtime, to help our brain relax and switch off for the day. This aligns with wider research on the positive impact on reading on sleep (Sella, et al. 2023: Penguin Random House, 2020). Reading before bed can help physical relaxation and create a good sleep routine that improves our sleep pattern. Our data shows that people's reading habits could have an impact on how rested they feel after sleep - those reading every day are **1.6 times** more likely to meet the need for sleep compared to those who never read.

Did you know we have a course 'Sleep Well Work Well' which highlights the importance of sleeping well and how this can affect your work and home life?

Why is reading beneficial for our mental health?

Ezra, Head of Education at Suffolk Mind

Reading can benefit us in many ways but can be as simple as having private time to escape the demands of a busy life. In this way reading can also allow us to exercise our imagination, retreating from the world for a time, perhaps to see it with fresh eyes when we put a book down. Equally, reading to forget our day-to-day lives may allow us to go off to sleep more easily after a few pages.

When we empathise with a character's challenges, we are exercising our empathy and judgement over their lives. We may reflect upon how we may have reacted to the surprises, disappointments or achievements of their lives. In this way, reading may support us to develop emotional intelligence.

If, as we become invested in their journey, we follow the arc of their development as they overcome challenges, we may take onboard these patterns as metaphors for our own lives. These patterns may in turn shape how we respond to challenges: like the characters in our favourite novels, are we also able to persist when faced with adversity? To solve problems? To make friends and be friends to others?

Community Involvement

Our need for Community is met when we feel like we belong to a group. Engaging with the people and places around you can have a positive impact on your mental wellbeing.

Within the ENA survey, respondents are asked if factors such as community involvement helps their mental health. Over three quarters (76%) of those who selected 'Community Involvement' as a supporting factor to meeting one of their emotional or physical needs are in good wellbeing (n165). This group are meeting the need for Community well, where it ranks the 4th top need overall, on average. This is normally in the lower rankings of the fifteen emotional and physical needs – for example it is 13th for Suffolk respondents in 2025, on average.

Volunteering can be a way to get actively involved in the community where **volunteers are over 2.5 times more likely to be meeting the need for Community than non-volunteers**. Volunteers have the top average score for the Community need compared to all other demographic groups.

Altruism is the desire to help others, above your own interests - and volunteering is a key example of this. Studies have shown that engaging in altruistic behaviour contributes to good wellbeing (Rhoads and Marsh, 2023). This aligns with our research where volunteer respondents are one of the most well demographics year after year, highlighting the psychological positive impact.

Qualitative feedback from volunteers at Suffolk Mind services further illustrates how volunteering has enabled them to support other people, whilst also supporting themselves:



“I have always wanted to volunteer. I have had some big life changes and more time to do this. I wanted to give back to my community”

“I’m learning more about mental health and how to support people”

“I retired and was looking for something creative and outside - gardening and allotments are one of my hobbies. I found out about the site”

“I went from working full time to retiring which is quite a big step. I wanted to prepare for big changes in life and knowing that I needed to look after my mental health. I have met some lovely people in all different circumstances. Really happy I’m involved.”

Access to Nature

Being outside in nature can boost both our mental wellbeing and physical health. It can contribute to an overall improvement in our mood which helps us meet a variety of our emotional and physical needs. For instance, our access to nature supports outside physical activity, allows us to connect with others and reduces our stress levels.

“The outdoors and living in the countryside definitely helps”

“Connection to nature and access to green spaces are crucial for my wellbeing”

In particular, access to nature supports people in meeting their needs for...

Community –

Having access to green spaces can help us meet the need for Community - with **38%** of respondents meeting this need reporting it as a key supporting factor. Green spaces can be important places for social groups to gather, presenting opportunities to foster emotional connection. These areas can act as a ‘third place’ - a concept that offers a separate social environment from the two usual domains of home (first place) and workplace (second place) (Oldenburg, 1989). These ‘third places’ are significant in the way that we socialise with others and are an accessible way to meet the need for Community:

“Playing sports in a team”

“Working on the allotment is very positive because of physical exercise, being in nature and meeting other allotment holders”

Control –

Respondents’ access to nature helps people feel in control of their lives where **43%** reported that this was a supporting factor for meeting this need. For example, respondents sharing that being outside helps them to relax:

“I love gardening so being in nature helps me keep calm and serene”

“Being outside has a relaxing feeling”

Sometimes having some fresh air outside can give us a perspective shift. Being in nature can be an exercise in grounding for those feeling anxious, by focusing on the things around us rather than internalised scrutiny.

The data collected demonstrates how people are using green spaces to meet different emotional needs. Whether this is for outside physical exercise or for socialising with others, green spaces are an anchor to our wellbeing.

Movement –

Our need for Movement can be met by being outside. Over half of respondents (**53%**) who felt they were getting enough physical activity reported this was due to their access to nature and outdoors. This was the second top supporting factor for meeting this need (just behind hobbies and interests). Being outside in green spaces can be a quick and easy way to meet our need for Movement. Incorporating small amounts of movement into daily routines such as taking a walk at lunchtime, doing physical activity outside or being involved in team sports can help meet this need. Our mental health and physical health are very interlinked. How often we sleep, how often we move and what we eat, all have an impact on our mental health, whether this is positively or negatively. The physical needs (Sleep, Food & Drink and Movement) are often the lowest met needs across Suffolk. Therefore, it is worth looking into how we can meet these needs better to improve our overall mental wellbeing.

“Walking in nature is very helpful”

Exercising can also be beneficial for good quality sleep where **35%** reported that their access to nature is a supporting factor for them meeting this need.

“Exercise helps me to sleep”

Security –

Being outside in nature can also give us a sense of security. Over a third (**36%**) of those meeting the need for Security have reported their access to green spaces as a supporting factor to them feeling safe and secure.

Access to nature

Changing landscapes

In Suffolk, we are fortunate to have a diverse range of scenery, with a predominately rural landscape, coastlines, historic towns and urban hubs.

Not everyone has equal access to nature and outdoor spaces. A 2024 report by The Health Foundation notes that there are inequalities in green space access – such as those living in deprived areas having more difficulty accessing these areas. This can be a factor in health inequality. This, therefore, can be a barrier for people meeting their needs, with 9% of our respondents stating that lack of access to green spaces prevents them meeting one of their emotional or physical needs.

“I enjoy a lot of outdoor hobbies which are limited by the area I live in as a lot of things I would like to do are a lot further than I am able to travel or cost a lot of money”

East Suffolk Council Project 2025:

In 2025, the local council commissioned our research team to explore the wellbeing of residents living in an area that is undergoing change and uncertainty, where multiple large energy projects are currently being built. We measured residents' wellbeing and completed qualitative case studies to explore how these energy projects have affected residents. The findings from the report demonstrated the importance of the environment and access to nature for the wellbeing of those living in this area. The changing landscape and environment evidently disrupted residents' emotional needs. Some were devastated by the destruction of the local environment, where their needs for Security, Control and Movement were significantly affected*:

“I enjoy walking in the countryside for clearing my mind, but it's difficult to go anywhere to avoid the devastation caused by one project or another in the area”

“In particular, it is affecting my mental health as I used to love cycling around all the lovely local lanes and now find myself avoiding them because of the construction works, traffic, noise etc. Because of this I'm avoiding cycling in the area and that is a negative impact on my mental health”

“I have to travel further afield to access nature and outdoors which I do, though sometimes with resentment that I should need to do this.”

“I feel better when I walk outside but some areas I love to walk in are negatively affected by Sizewell and National Grid infrastructure construction”

*If you are interested in finding out more, please [click here for the full report](#) or visit our Suffolk Mind Website.

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Conclusion

This State of Suffolk report has explored how we can better meet our emotional needs – by volunteering, getting outside in nature and reading. It shows that making one small change can result in a positive benefit in many areas of our wellbeing. For instance, joining a community group in the local area may help an individual meet their social, physical and motivational needs.

It can be sometimes difficult to actively engage in activities that can help us meet our emotional and physical needs better. It may involve adapting our routines and making conscious changes.

Sometimes when we move down the Mental Health Continuum, we can lose motivation and enjoyment in the things that normally interest us:

“Not having the energy to complete any hobbies that I used to enjoy means no stress relief or joy”

“I used to have a few hobbies, but now I have zero motivation or energy to engage in them.”

If you need some extra support, Suffolk Mind can help. Take a look at our ‘Our Services’ section of the website, or speak to one of our Helpline team by calling **0300 111 6000** or emailing info@suffolkmind.org.uk

Are you living in Suffolk?

Contribute to the **State of Suffolk 2026** Report by taking part in the Emotional Needs Audit [here](#).

References

Oldenburg, R. (2023). The Great Good Place: Cafés, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, hair salons, and other hangouts at the heart of a community. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/ji.9561417> (Downloaded: 07 May 2026).

Penguin Random House. (2020) Read to Sleep Survey Results. Available at: <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/articles/read-to-sleep-survey-results/> (Accessed: 7 May 2026).

Rhoads, S. and Marsh, A. (2023) 'Doing Good and Feeling Good: Relationships Between Altruism and Well-being for Altruists, Beneficiaries, and Observers', in World Happiness Report 2023 (11th ed., Chapter 4). Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

Sella, E. et al. (2023) 'How emotions induced by reading influence sleep quality in young and older adults', *Aging & Mental Health*, 27(9), pp. 1812–1820. doi: 10.1080/13607863.2022.2138266

The Health Foundation. (2024) Inequalities in access to green space. Available at: <https://www.health.org.uk/evidence-hub/surroundings/inequalities-in-access-to-green-space> (Accessed: 7 May 2026).

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Our research

Our research at Suffolk Mind focuses on looking at our emotional needs as a mental health measure. These are 12 physical and emotional needs that if we meet in balance, help us maintain healthy mental wellbeing. The information we collect to inform this includes the [Emotional Needs Audit](#). This comprises 15 questions on how well met needs are, scored from -3 to 3.

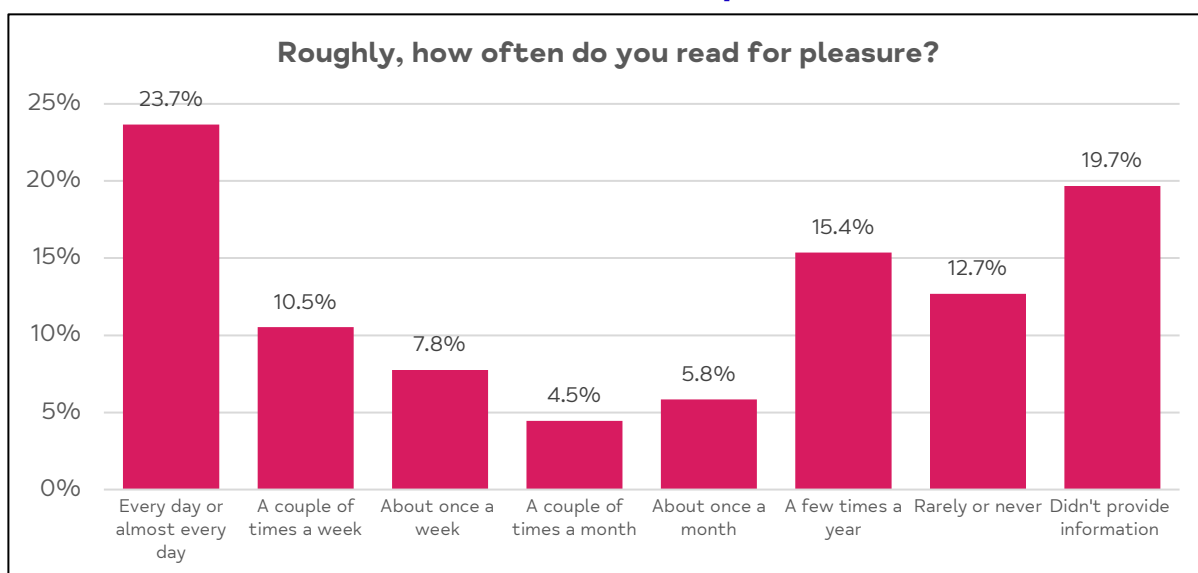
Meeting a need: When we say ‘meeting a need’ this means that the average score is over 1 (on a scale of -3 to +3).

Percentage (%) meeting need: The percentage of respondents scoring over 1 in the whole ENA or for a specific emotional need.

Supporting factor: When someone indicated that a need is met well (a score of 2 or 3), we asked what specifically helped them meet that need.

Barrier: When someone indicated that a need was not being met (a score of -2 or -3), we asked what specifically hindered them in meeting that need.

Who were our 2025 respondents?



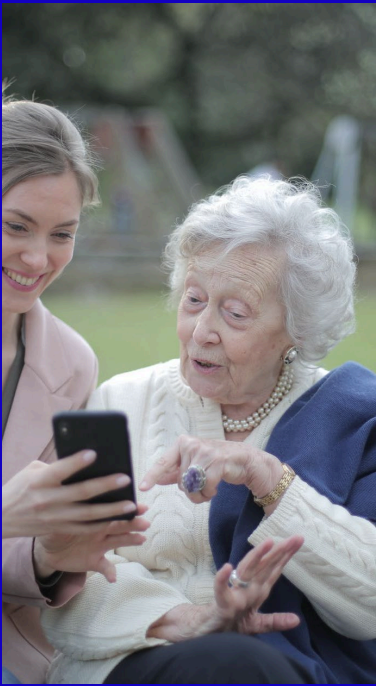
What are our 2025 respondents' reading habits like?

Our respondents presented a range of reading habits. Nearly a quarter of our respondents read every day (24%) and 13% never engage in reading. There is the lowest response rate from those reading a couple times a month at 5%. Out of respondents who answered this question, over two thirds are reading at least once a month.

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Who were our 2025 respondents?

<p style="text-align: center;">Age</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Age Group</th> <th>Response Rate (%)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Under 18</td> <td>2.3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>18-24</td> <td>8.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>25-34</td> <td>17.1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>35-44</td> <td>16.3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>45-54</td> <td>17.3%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>55-64</td> <td>17.0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>65-74</td> <td>5.8%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>75+</td> <td>3.0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No information</td> <td>12.8%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Age Group	Response Rate (%)	Under 18	2.3%	18-24	8.5%	25-34	17.1%	35-44	16.3%	45-54	17.3%	55-64	17.0%	65-74	5.8%	75+	3.0%	No information	12.8%	<p>Response rates by age:</p> <p>There are a fairly equal number of responses from those aged between 25 and 64 – with around 17% from each category.</p> <p>However, there are just under 2% of respondents aged under 18 and 3% over the age of 75.</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;">Gender</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Gender</th> <th>Response Rate (%)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Female (including trans woman)</td> <td>56%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Male (including trans man)</td> <td>24%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Didn't provide information</td> <td>16%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Non-binary or self describe</td> <td>2%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Prefer not to say</td> <td>2%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Gender	Response Rate (%)	Female (including trans woman)	56%	Male (including trans man)	24%	Didn't provide information	16%	Non-binary or self describe	2%	Prefer not to say	2%	<p>Response rates by gender:</p> <p>We heard the most from women – where they made up over half of the responses in 2025.</p>								
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<p style="text-align: center;">Suffolk District</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Suffolk District</th> <th>Response Rate (%)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>East Suffolk</td> <td>45.9%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ipswich</td> <td>26.5%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>West Suffolk</td> <td>14.4%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mid Suffolk</td> <td>10.1%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Babergh</td> <td>3.1%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Suffolk District	Response Rate (%)	East Suffolk	45.9%	Ipswich	26.5%	West Suffolk	14.4%	Mid Suffolk	10.1%	Babergh	3.1%	<p>Response rates by Suffolk District:</p> <p>We collect data across all of Suffolk. The majority of our 2025 respondents are in the East Suffolk Region.</p> <p>We have a small number of responses in the Babergh area – only 3%.</p>								
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