

Tri-County Women's Centre Annual Report April 1st. 2014- March 31st. 2015

Summary

This year marks our thirteenth year of operations, and we continue to gain strength as our partnerships and collaborative work with other agencies deepens.

Central to our work are our two mandates; 1) the provision of direct services and 2) initiatives to address women's economic & social well-being. As we frame our work around these two mandates, it enables us to work with incredible women and men, and be involved in projects and initiatives with a diverse group of stakeholders, women, youth, and families. It is through these relationships that we develop our strength, direction, and purpose.

From projects and programs, to the day-to-day running of the Centre, there is a steady flow of women, youth, and community stakeholders coming in and out of our three locations. These are strong indicators that we are an accessible, supportive, and dynamic place for everyone.

As a tri county service it is essential we have our services and programs accessible across all three counties. This past year we re-located our Digby office, while our main office in Yarmouth and Outreach Office in Shelburne remain the same. Having a physical space and staff presence in all three counties enables us to be accessible, and carry out our core services and project work equitably across the tri counties.

Over this past year we advocated for a more progressive approach in two areas of public policy that are having a profound impact on women:

- 1) The Provincial Maintenance Enforcement Program needs to be overhauled. We met with the Minister of Justice and her colleagues on this, as it forces, primarily women and their children, to live in deep poverty due to the ineffectiveness of the program. The model needs the government, in the absence of payment, to pay the court-ordered child maintenance, and the government then seek payment from the non-payer.
- 2) Income Assistance rates, that primarily affect women and the disabled, are too low and force people to live in poverty. We need to stop managing the poor and look at a social safety net system that is based on a guaranteed livable income (GLI).

Direct Services

We still have a number of serious pressures due to staffing shortages. This year we provided support and advocacy to over **850 individuals** across the tri-counties. As the

need for our one on one support counselling services increases, we need to increase our staff compliment to address this service need across the three counties.

Our community development projects & initiatives over the last year have been significant. For some we have specific funding and others are part of our day-to-day operations, as we work to make our communities a better place for women and their families.

Women's Economic Security

This was the last year of our *Community Plan to Address Women's Economic Security* project. The project enabled us to do some extensive groundwork in Yarmouth Town and County on; affordable & supportive housing, childcare needs, youth engagement, and employment programs and models for women. Many of these activities are being sustained after the project completion.

Sexual Violence Prevention & Intervention

This past year we did extensive work on sexual violence prevention and intervention under our Demonstration Project, as part of the Nova Scotia Sexual Violence Strategy. In collaboration with the Tri-County Women's Health Coalition we carried out a number of activities including; training, piloted programs, hosted a number of focus groups and educational opportunities, developed resources, organized a provincial forum on the harms of on-line pornography, advocated for the SANE program in our region, and developed a logic model to lay out our collaborative approach for the tri county sexual violence prevention and intervention work. We are also involved in a cyberbullying project through the YWCA in Halifax.

Youth Leadership

Under our Youth Truth Matters (YTM) project, a youth leadership approach to drug prevention, we have been able to continue:

- our youth leadership on drug use prevention across the tri counties
- enhance our YTM Tool kit to include a number of social issues impacting youth today
- work with other communities across the province and in Labrador on our youth approach to drug prevention

Affordable & Supportive Housing

In each of the three counties, we have been collaborating with stakeholders to continue to address the need for more affordable and supportive housing. In Digby County we have the Digby & Area Affordable & Supportive Housing (DAASH) group, in Yarmouth County we have Community Housing Options Initiative through Collaboration and Engagement (CHOICE), and in Shelburne we have Shelburne & Area Affordable & Supportive Housing (SAASH) group. All these stakeholders are working to identify and prioritize actions to address the housing needs in their county for the most vulnerable.

Food Security

Our collaborative work on Food Security continues under the Tri County Local food Network. We hosted a Community Forum, and Shelburne was one of the locations for significant research on food security through the Mt. Saint Vincent Food ARC project. We continue to be directly involved in two community gardens.

Clinical Services

The Leahey Wellness Clinic, which is an extension of our services, continues to be well used by women and the general community. With the clinic open one to two half days a week over this past year, services were provided to 284 individuals.

Communication

We continue to make our services, programs, and projects accessible to the broader community by producing our quarterly newsletter, keeping our website updated, maintaining a toll-free phone line, and keeping our Outreach Offices open as much as possible.

Connect – Nova Scotia Association of Women’s Centres

Our association is a very important voice for the collective work of women’s centres across the province. Our membership consists of nine women’s centres located across the province, who are autonomous organizations that identify their own priorities based on community need, and collectively provides a strong advocacy voice on issues that impact women’s social and economic wellbeing across the province.

Nova Scotia Advisory Committee on the Status of Women

Within the provincial government structure, and the agency we are responsible to, we are now under the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women (NSACSW). We see this as a positive alignment of our mandate and vision and the opportunities to support each other’s work.

Operational Funding

Our operational funding does not enable us to have the full complement of staffing hours required to meet our direct service, programing, and community development work across the tri counties. Our committed staff put in many overtime hours to address the needs and requests for services, programs, and our community development work.

Our appreciation

On behalf of TCWC Board and Staff, we want to thank the provincial government for on-going operational funding. As well, the other funding sources, highlighted in the annual report, enabled us to carry out a number of programs and initiatives. The agencies we worked with over the last year in the tri-county area and across the province have been vital to our successes. We are appreciative of everyone’s support.

The following gives more information on the activities we have carried out and the partners we have worked with over the last fiscal year.

Direct Services

Our direct services are a combination of prevention & intervention services and programs. The provision of individual support and advocacy with women, adolescent girls, and youth is central to our work. We continue to ensure that our services are both flexible and accessible, enabling us to respond to the needs of women, girls, and the community. This is one of the reasons our service is appreciated by both service users and other service providers.

Support Counseling and Advocacy Services

This is the largest part of our direct services work. This individual one-on-one service is accessible to all females. If the female seeking our services requires an immediate intervention we will meet with her immediately. If the need isn't immediate a Support Counselor will see her within a few days. Being able to maintain our service so it is accessible within a short time frame is central to how we do our work.

Women come in for assistance on various issues, including separation and divorce, maintenance enforcement, affordable housing, work place harassment, sexual assault, losing custody of their child(ren), parenting concerns, financial problems, depression and isolation issues. The amount of time it takes with individual women/girls can vary from one visit to many support counselling sessions, and advocacy to other appointments outside the Centre. We do not limit the number of times a woman can use our services and, from our experience, she knows when she is in need of services and that she can access our services at any time. Our individual support counselling and advocacy services are provided to individual women and girls we meet through our three locations as well projects and programming. This can be very hard to track. Taking into consideration all our support counselling and advocacy, we estimate we have provided this service to between 850 - 900 women and girls over the last year, or an average of 60 – 70 individual women/girls each month across the tri counties.

Programs

The other part of our direct service work is programming. Due to the high need for our support and advocacy service, we did less programming than usual. Programming is an essential part of our service delivery as it provides women the opportunity for shared learning, friendships, and social supports. Some programs we offer under our operational funds and others we were able to offer due to specific project funding. Below is the list of programs we offered over the last year in each county.

Leahey Wellness Clinic

This past year the clinic has proven to be a significant community asset as individuals without a doctor, and referrals from medical professionals, continues to increase. Two hundred and eighty-four (284) individuals accessed services through the clinic last year. We are very thankful to Dr. Shelagh Leahey for coming forward as the clinician to deliver the services. Her reputation and status across the community and medical profession have contributed greatly to our success. It is fantastic to have this service co-located with us. *Funded through Community Volunteers, Public Health, and Yarmouth Community Health Board.*

Programs for Adult Women

Yarmouth

Path to a Healthy Lifestyle

We offered this program in the Spring 2014. The program covers a variety of topics including self-esteem, communication, goal setting, societal expectations, and anger as a positive force, coping with change and stress management. It also included some physical activity and sessions on nutrition, relaxation, and accessing other services. We had 8 women participate. *Funded under our Operational funds*

Encore

This program is for women who are survivors of breast cancer. It is a gentle exercise program specifically designed for women recovering from breast cancer surgery and/or women who have had breast cancer at any time in their lives. We were able to offer this program three times and were encouraged by the funder to re-apply. We had on average 7 women participate in each program. We offer this program in partnership with the YMCA –Yarmouth. *Funded by the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation*

Outreach Offices in Shelburne and Digby

Our Outreach Office provides our part-time staff with a small office and space to meet women and provide services to women across each county. Just like our main office, the outreach staff provides support and advocacy to any woman who needs it. They work with other service providers to ensure she has access to other services to assist her and her family. The offices are also used by our project staff involved in the delivery of the Voices Program, Sexual Violence project, and Youth Truth Matters project work.

Shelburne Outreach

Food Security Project – The Outreach Office is used for both support work and community projects. The food security project called FoodARC, under Mount St. Vincent University and through Community University Research Alliance (CURA) funding, continued over from the previous year. Our outreach staff was directly involved in the community based research and our space used for the project.

Healthy Perspectives Program - We offered this program in partnership with Mental Health. It provided women an opportunity to identify issues and information about their personal health that they wanted to discuss and be more informed about.

Affordable & Supportive Housing in Shelburne - In partnership with a number of stakeholders across the county we are looking at the needs and solutions to addressing this important social issue that impacts women and their families.

Project work – In addition to direct service and community development work, our project work, under our Sexual Violence and Youth Truth Matters projects are carried out across the county.

Digby Outreach

Re-location of our Office Space - We worked with another six agencies over the last year to co-locate in a former school. While that effort was not successful, we did move into a healthier space that is accessible. It is small and we need to continue to seek out a more suitable location that fits our budget.

Digby & Area Affordable & Supportive Housing (DAASH) – We are working with a number of stakeholders on addressing affordable & supportive housing across the populations in Digby Town and County. *Some funding from Digby Community Health Board & Municipality of Digby.*

Cooking Program – We offered this program in cooperation with the Digby Learning Network. *Funded by Digby Community Health Board and Shopper's Drug Mart (Digby) Community Fund.*

Building Confidence through Art – This was a two part summer program we offered women. From there the women continued to meet socially and provide mutual support.

Weymouth Walking Program - This is a weekly program for anyone who wants to join in.

Programs for Young Women/ Girls/ Youth

Voices

We were able to offer this 18-week school based self-awareness program for high-risk girls between the ages of 12-17 who are identified through the participating schools. Within this fiscal year we completed two programs, one each in Yarmouth and Digby. We also started four programs, two in Digby, one in Shelburne and one in Yarmouth. On average we had 8 girls in each program. *Funded under the Youth Development Initiative, Dept. of Community Services.*

Youth Engagement

We have done a lot of youth engagement over this past year, through our Youth Truth Matters youth leadership project work, the Youth Committee on the Women's Economic Security project, the Cyber Bullying project the YWCA Halifax is overseeing, focus groups under our Sexual Violence project, the Healthy Relationships for Youth (HRY) program we piloted this year, and our Youth Forum on Porn Conference.

Projects

We had a number of interesting and exciting projects over the last year. These projects enable us to work on the broader social issues that impact women's equality across the three counties.

Youth Truth Matters (YTM)

This three year funded project enables us to work with youth and community on addressing drug use prevention through youth leadership. We have;

- enhanced our Youth Truth Matters Toolkit (in French & English) to include a number of social issues that impacts youth and drug abuse
- provided orientation sessions on the YTM toolkit to agencies across the province and Port Hope Simpson in Labrador
- hosted youth leadership forums and youth leadership training
- collaborated with Mental Health & Addictions on the Municipal alcohol Project

Funded by Health Canada under DSCIF (Drug Strategy Community Initiatives Fund)

Sexual Violence Prevention & Intervention – Demonstration Project

As part of the Nova Scotia Sexual Violence Strategy, we were one of six sites chosen by the province as a Demonstration Site to address sexual violence prevention and intervention. In collaboration with the Tri-County Women’s Health Coalition we carried out;

- Professional training with stakeholders across the tri counties on implementing trauma informed practices and programming
- By-Stander and Man-to-Man training
- Piloted the Healthy Relationship for Youth Program in four schools
- Hosted a number of focus groups with youth and adults
- Provided educational sessions to students and agencies in the community on sexual violence
- Development of resources pertaining to sexual violence services and prevention
- Advocated for the establishment of a SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner) program in our region
- Developed a *logic model* to lay out our collaborative approach for the tri county sexual violence prevention and intervention work
- Hosted a two-day provincial forum titled *Growing up in Our Porn Culture: What is the Problem, What Can We Do*, with a part being just for youth and the other for community and service providers.
- Partner with the YWCA Halifax on their Cyberbullying project

As we continue to develop our expertise and leadership on sexual violence prevention & intervention services, it is apparent that a therapist on staff would enable us to create the services and programs needed to address the intervention needs.

Funded by Province of Nova Scotia under the NS Sexual Violence Strategy

Women's Economic Security (WES) – Developing a Community Plan:

Over the last three years, we have been fortunate to have the opportunity to do intensive work on Women's Economic Security. With this past year being the last year of the project, it was important to look at sustainability.

When we started the project, we used an open and welcoming community development process to encourage the involvement of a broad range of stakeholders. These stakeholders help us identify the priorities that we worked with over the three-year period.

1. Safe & Affordable Housing:

The CHOICE Committee has created several reports to illustrate the need for safe & affordable housing in our area. The Committee has a large group of stakeholders involved including representation from the not-for-profit sector, private sector, first voice, as well as Municipal and Provincial Government. With collaboration from a broad representation of community partners and stakeholders, the group has created a Logic Model, which will serve as the community plan for housing. The CHOICE Committee is having discussions with Provincial and Federal Government agencies, to explore funding options to address the numerous issues identified in the Logic Model.

2. Transportation:

The group has had discussions with Municipal Government over the course of the past three years. The community recognizes that local transportation is a very important piece in providing low-income women opportunities for education and employment, however we understand and appreciate that the solutions are costly. The Town of Yarmouth has recently announced that it will launch a new fixed route transit system in Autumn, 2015. The Municipality of the District of Yarmouth and the Municipality of Argyle have both conducted studies and are having discussions around solutions.

3. Child Care:

The Committee recruited stakeholders from the not-for-profit sector, early childhood education, Provincial government and private businesses who work in the child care sector. The Committee has focused on the primary issue identified, which was the affordability of childcare. A new Early Years Centre opened in our area this past year, and because of the discussions within the Child Care Committee, they decided to conduct a needs assessment. The committee members participated in the creation of the questionnaire. 589 responses were received and the results are currently being used by the Early Years Centre to structure their programming. Another new group called the Community Coalition, focused on the early years was formed this past year. They will continue the work of the Child Care Committee.

4. Employment & Economy:

The Employment & Economy Committee consisted of two groups, which worked on separate projects.

- a) The Tri-County Women's Centre Board and employees took the lead on **developing social enterprises**: A Services to Seniors Pilot Project is underway and a contract was signed with Continuing Care NS (a division of the NS Dept. of Health) to allow the enterprise to direct bill for services. New sources of funding are being explored as the program that provided funding for seniors to access this service was cut during the last Provincial Budget.
- b) A **Jewelry Enterprise Pilot Project** is also underway. Four women artisans will sell products from a kiosk, placed next to the ferry terminal for the summer months. The Town of Yarmouth has asked the Women's Centre to sign an MOU, for management of this kiosk. The Women's Centre will provide support to the artisans as they further explore the formation of a co-operative or a social enterprise.
- c) Various employment support agencies hosted **Employer Luncheons** to create awareness of the barriers faced by women and to encourage employers to use existing resources and supports to help them hire individuals with barriers to employment.
- d) **Mentorship Program for Women:**
The Women's Centre piloted a Mentorship Program through the WES Project. We used various approaches to help women gain confidence and trust in others. We offered an intense program designed to help the women make decisions to move forward with their lives. The Women's Centre is in communication with Provincial Government representatives (NS Dept. of Advanced Education & Labour) to secure funding for a longer-term Mentorship Program for Women.

5. Youth:

The Youth Committee was focused on creating entrepreneurship activities for the youth. A series of workshops called Biz Craft were organized for youth in partnership with the Centre for Entrepreneurship Education and Development (CEED). The Town and Municipal Councils are working with the youth involved to develop a "youth council".

Funded by Status of Women Canada.

Tri-County Local Food Network (TCLFN)

We continue to be an active member of the network as we promote the Buy Local message. As part of the TCLFN, we administered the CURA (Community University Research Alliance) project that is based in the Shelburne and Lockeport communities that focused on local food security research. We hosted a Community Forum on Food Security that attracted a lot of interest and we continue to organize community discussions with stakeholders on a progressive model to address food security for the most vulnerable. *Funded by Public Health and Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) & Mt. St. Vincent.*

Special Events

Growing Up in Our Porn Culture: What is the Problem? What Can We Do?

The hosting and organizing of this provincial forum, with the Tri-County Women's Health Coalition, was a significant body of work. The three key speakers we brought in are international experts on the harms of on-line pornography to women's safety and youth development.

It helped to deepen and encourage difficult but necessary discussions about pornography, especially on-line pornography, both in our community and across the province.

We have developed some leadership on this issue, and will continue to work with stakeholders in our community and across the province to address the harms to women, children, and society.

Funded through local businesses and A Hundred Women Who Care - Yarmouth

Christmas Tea

Hosting this annual event provides us an opportunity to invite the community and our partners to the Centre, have fun, eat, and be merry. This was also a fundraiser for the fuel bank fund.

Women & Business Group - Winterlude

Working with a small group of women in business, we oversee the hosting and management of this event that is a Trade Show for local Women in Business, as well as an opportunity to offer activities and workshops throughout the day. This year was the biggest year yet with about 540 people going through.

Fundraising

Our operational funding is not enough to cover our costs and the need to raise additional funds is always present. Whether it is an expense to maintain our house, replenish supplies for the Centre or Clinic, or the opportunity to further our work, we are very grateful to the community for their generous financial support.

“Friends of the Women’s Centre”

This remarkable group of women and men came through again with some incredible fundraising events to assist us with expenses that come up. This year we had to have our oil tank replaced and some chimney work done. There are also other expenses, like supplies for the Centre and the Clinic, that requires additional funds.

One Hundred Women Who Care – Yarmouth

A group of committed women started this group and their sole purpose is to raise funds for local not-for-profit agencies that have charitable status. They disperse their funds each quarter and we were the fortunate recipient of their first financial offering.

Shopper’s Drug Mart (Digby)

Each year they do an annual fundraising drive through their store and this year they chose our Digby Outreach Office as the recipient for the funds.

Community Partnerships/ Networks/ Collaborations

Besides some of the agencies and groups already mentioned in the report, the Centre has also been involved on several advisory committees, boards and community initiatives.

- ❑ Public Health – The Community Health Developers at Public Health are particularly supportive and helpful in a number of areas of our work. We are very thankful for their abilities and our strong partnership.
- ❑ Tri-County Women’s Health Coalition – The coalition is focused on the broad determinates of women’s health; addiction, housing and violence against women. Over the course of our Sexual Violence Demonstration Project, they were the Advisory Committee to the project work.
- ❑ Restorative Justice Process – We sit on the committee when there is a youth in conflict.

- ❑ SchoolsPlus – We work very closely with the SchoolsPlus programs across the tri-counties and collaborate on program delivery when possible.
- ❑ Health Promoting Schools - A joint effort between Public Health, Tri-County Regional School Board and community organizations. The purpose is to strive to support schools, strengthening their capacity to create a healthy setting for learning, living and working.
- ❑ Chamber of Commerce – We are a member and participate in events that are relevant to the Centre.
- ❑ Women’s Fishnet – Shelburne/ Lockport – Our Outreach Office staff is in regular communication and continues to make connections and create possibilities to work together.
- ❑ West Nova Inclusive Employment Society – This agency works with the disabled community and we have a representative on the Board.
- ❑ SHYFT Youth Services Society – This agency is overseeing the day-to-day operations of the SHYFT house and we work in close collaboration.
- ❑ Harmony Bazaar – An annual Women’s Festival in Lockport. We continue to be an official sponsor for the volunteers. Our banner is displayed with the other sponsors and we are included in the promotional materials and on the volunteers’ t-shirts.
- ❑ Hospital Hullabaloo – We assist the Hospital Auxiliary with their major fundraising event.
- ❑ Yarmouth Women in Business group – They have asked us to hold their funds and to be the lead organization in organizing their annual “Women’s Winterlude” event.
- ❑ We collaborated with the Community Outreach Services Group to raise funds for the fuel bank at our Holiday Tea.
- ❑ Health Fairs – We participated in a number of school and community health fair events across the tri-counties.

Provincial Associations

Our provincial associations make it possible for us to be more effective in our work. Whether it is our ability to address our core funding priorities or public policies that impact women’s equality, we are better and stronger due to these relationships.

Connect! The Association of Women's Centres in Nova Scotia

We are active members of our Association. Over the last year we have been meeting with elected representatives and senior government officials on a number of public policy areas that impact women and girls, as well as our operational funding needs. One area that is becoming a policy priority is an approach to limiting access to on-line pornography called Opt In - Opt Out approach that needs serious consideration with social policy advocates and legislators. Included in this report is the Annual Connect Report that goes into more detail of the work we are part of under our Association.

Sexual Violence Services Network of Nova Scotia

We are an active member of the network that is for community-based agencies across the province to work collaboratively, respond to sexualized violence issues, and support local sexual assault initiatives.

Student Placements

Each year we provide students a work placement to assist them in their careers. Last year we provided placements for students at U. St. Anne, High School, and NSCC.

Priorities for the Next Year

Building on our current work and community initiatives, there is a need for additional staffing here at the Centre:

- Our **operational funding** needs to increase to address our staff shortages. We need:
 - Another Support Worker/ Program Coordinator
 - Therapist to deliver community based trauma informed therapy and programming
 - An Assistant Executive Director

- Continue to **address sexual violence** prevention and intervention services:
 - Prevention Coordinator to work with youth and community on sexualized violence prevention
 - Development of a SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner) program, a SART (Sexual Assault Response Team)
 - Work with stakeholders on pornography as a public health issue

- ❑ Continue to develop the Tri County Local Food Network as part of our pro-active efforts to address [food security](#) issues:
 - More community dialogue with other food security stakeholders on models for addressing food needs for the most vulnerable (ie: Food Centres).
- ❑ Funds to maintain an Office Administrator at the [Leahey Wellness Clinic](#):
 - Seek funding
- ❑ Continue to address [women's economic security](#) by building on the work and investment put into the Community Plan to Address Women's Economic Security:
 - Work with women in creating Social Enterprises and Cooperatives for women
 - Advocate for a comprehensive re-entry program for women
 - Advocate for universal childcare
 - Create opportunities for youth
 - Continue to address progressive approaches to Income Assistance and Maintenance Enforcement
- ❑ Work with all stakeholders to establish [affordable & supportive housing](#) for women:
 - In collaboration with the housing groups in each county ensure that these women, especially young mothers and low-income women are a priority within any housing development
- ❑ Strengthen our [Outreach Capacity](#):
 - As a tri-county service, we need additional funding to enable us to have our two Outreach Offices open more hours
- ❑ [Adolescents/ Youth Leadership](#):
 - Advocate for Sexual Health Education in schools and community
 - More programming such as Voices/ Healthy Relationships for Youth (HRY) programs in all the schools
 - Continue to create youth leadership opportunities to address social issues; sexual violence/ hypersexualization, housing, illicit drugs and addiction issues

Staff

Name	Position
Bernadette MacDonald	Executive Director
Michele Archibald – Hattie (April – June 2014)	Program Coordinator/ Support Counselor
Keely King (July / 14 – June 2015)	
Karen Stewart	Financial Coordinator
Marlene Surette	Office Manager
Roberta Journey	Digby Outreach Worker
Patricia Vanaman	Shelburne Outreach Worker/ Sexual Violence Project
Kirsta Morris	Youth Truth Matters Project Youth Worker / Sexual Violence Project / Voices Facilitator
Lisanne Turner (April 2014 – June 2014)	Digby County Youth Truth Matters Project Youth Worker / Sexual Violence Project / Voices Facilitator
Amy MacKinnon	Shelburne County Youth Truth Matters Project / Sexual Violence Project/ Voices Facilitator
Evan Nemeth (July 2014 – June 2015)	Digby County Youth Truth Matters Project Youth Worker/ Sexual Violence Project
Miranda MacLean	Digby County Sexual Violence Project / Voices Facilitator
Tonya Seabrook	Sexual Violence Project Coordinator
Kathleen d'Entremont -Mooney	Women's Economic Security Project
Melissa Amero	Women's Economic Security Project/ Social Enterprise Coordinator
Lisa Deville	Women's Economic Security Project/ Social Enterprise Coordinator

Board of Directors

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