



image: joshua hanson via unsplash

WHEN WE SING
it sounds like there are
MORE OF US

FINDINGS FROM THE FIRST COHORT OF THE CARERS' MUSIC FUND





Since September 2019, Spirit of 2012's Carers' Music Fund projects have been engaging female carers across the UK in music activities with the aim of reducing loneliness, improving their mental health and wellbeing, and challenging gendered perceptions of caring.¹



The **What Works Centre for Wellbeing** is leading the Fund's Learning partnership, working alongside programme evaluators, **Apteligen**, the **Behavioural Insights Team** and **Carers UK**, to ensure that the **awarded projects** ground their work in the latest research on wellbeing and loneliness.



This briefing is the first in a series of insight reports and podcasts that explore the wellbeing benefits of participatory music-making activities.

It's based on data collected between October 2019 and March 2020, prior to the Coronavirus pandemic. Thinking ahead, the Fund's evaluation activities will help inform an increasingly complex post-COVID landscape which poses new challenges for the delivery and evaluation of wellbeing interventions.

¹ The Carers' Music Fund has been made possible by funding Spirit of 2012 received from the Tampon Tax Fund, awarded through the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The Tampon Tax Fund was set up to allocate the money generated from the VAT on sanitary products to projects that improve the lives of disadvantaged women and girls. Spirit was awarded £1.5 million from the fund in March 2019.

MORE ABOUT THE WOMEN THAT TOOK PART

Between October 2019 and March 2020, 287 women who are carers took part in the music-making activities delivered by eight Carers' Music Fund projects. Through the test-and-learn cohort approach grant-holders engaged women and girls of a wide range of age groups and carer profiles:

- The majority were of working age (16-64 yrs) (68%) and 13% were in the 10-15 age group as three of the projects specifically targeted young carers.
- 79% were of White-English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British ethnicity, followed by Chinese (14%) - one of the project's specific target groups.
- Two thirds of working-age participants (66%) were not in paid employment at the beginning of the projects.
- Participants had been in their caring roles for a range of time lengths, with half the sample having been carers for over eight years, 23% between three and eight years, and only 6% for less than one year.
- Almost half of the Fund's project participants were full-time carers providing over 90 hours per week (42%), while a quarter (25%) care for less than 20 hours. This is broadly consistent with the national picture which shows that 46% of carers across the UK care for more than 90 hours per week.
- Almost a third of participants cared for a child (28%), followed by a parent (17%), while a minority care for more than one person (15%).
- There was an equal split between participants who had received formal support as a carer before and those who hadn't.



KEY FINDINGS: personal wellbeing, loneliness and social connectedness at the start of the project

- **Carers' Music Fund projects are engaging individuals with low wellbeing.**
At the start of the projects, the wellbeing scores of participating carers were lower than national average scores across personal wellbeing measures (life satisfaction, feeling worthwhile, happiness, and anxiety).
- **When asked how often they feel lonely 13% said 'often or always'** which is more than double the figure reported in a national survey sample (6%).³
- **Data on relationships and social networks** of participants at the start of the projects show:
 - **25% of women and girls either disagreed or didn't fully agree that they had people to socialise with**, compared with 5.3% nationally.⁴
 - **While 73% agreed that there were people there for them when they needed help**, only 26% "strongly" agreed, in contrast to the national average (67%).⁵



"The Personal Wellbeing measures ask people to evaluate how satisfied they are with their lives, their sense that what they do in life is worthwhile, their day to day emotional experiences [happiness and anxiety] and wider mental wellbeing"

Office for National Statistics, 2014

3 Estimates from the 2019/20 Community Life Survey itemised data for adults (16+) in England. Available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/community-life-survey-201920>

4 Estimates from the 2018/19 Community Life Survey itemised data for adults (16+) in England. Response categories are: Definitely agree (67.3%) Tend to agree (27.4%) Tend to disagree (3.9%) Definitely disagree (1.4%). Available here: <http://nesstar.ukdataservice.ac.uk/webview/index.jsp?v=2&mode=documentation&submode=abstract&study=http://nesstar.ukdataservice.ac.uk:80/obj/fStudy/8294&top=yes>

5 Estimates from the 2018/19 Community Life Survey itemised data for adults (16+) in England. Available here: <http://nesstar.ukdataservice.ac.uk/webview/index.jsp?v=2&mode=documentation&submode=abstract&study=http://nesstar.ukdataservice.ac.uk:80/obj/fStudy/8294&top=yes>

CHANGES IN PERSONAL WELLBEING

- **By the end of cohort one, the average wellbeing of female carers had improved across the personal wellbeing measures**, particularly for life satisfaction, feeling worthwhile and happiness.
- **Overall, improvements were larger among adult carers** and carers who were not working, while for young carers, life satisfaction improved more than any other personal wellbeing measure.
- **Improvements were smaller for full-time carers**, likely reflecting the considerable caregiver burden faced by this group.

Table 1: Carers' Music Fund Personal Wellbeing scores at the start of the project and UK national wellbeing scores.

Statements	Average baseline scores (n=51)	UK Population Average scores ⁶
Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?	5.78	7.67
Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things in your life are worthwhile?	6.24	7.86
Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?	5.76	7.52
On a scale where 0 is "not at all anxious" and 10 is "completely anxious", overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?	5.35	3.00

Table 2: Carers' Music Fund Personal Wellbeing Scores at the start and end of the project

Statements	Average baseline scores (n=51)	Average endline scores
Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?	5.04	6.75
Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things in your life are worthwhile?	5.49	6.80
Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?	5.24	6.38
On a scale where 0 is "not at all anxious" and 10 is "completely anxious", overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?	5.35	4.50



"The project showed me that even though I feel like I can't do it and say I can't do it (performing in front of other people), I can always do it."

Project participant

⁶ Data from ONS Quarterly Personal Wellbeing data estimates for Q4 2019 (Nov 19 - Jan 20) Available here: <https://bit.ly/3kbgbl0>

FEELINGS ABOUT THE FUTURE AND SATISFACTION WITH THE PROGRAMME

- Nearly half of participants (42%) said they felt “a lot better” about their life and future after attending Carers' Music Fund project sessions.
- “Doing something as part of a group” and “time away from caring responsibilities” were the most commonly cited reasons (80% and 67%, respectively), suggesting that the Fund’s projects may be strengthening the social networks of participants as well as reducing levels of stress associated with the caring role.
- By the end of the project, just over half the sample (51%) said they were “very” or “extremely” likely to continue to be involved in some sort of music-making, reflecting high levels of satisfaction with the project.

Table 3: Positive aspects of project participation reported (n=45).

Response	Count
The opportunity to do something as part of a group	36
Being able to have time away from my caring responsibilities	30
Feeling a sense of achievement	15
Spending time with others who experience similar things to me	28
Developing new / furthering my music-making skills	19

The initial findings personal wellbeing outcomes achieved for grant-holders look promising. To gain a more accurate picture of wellbeing effects and of the contribution of Carers' Music Fund projects, the Learning partnership will continue to support grant-holders with data collection as well as qualitative insights on how and why wellbeing improves for specific groups of carers.

See our [blog](#) for the next insight report which explores the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on projects, with learning on the challenges and adaptations that have begun to shape the Fund's next phase of delivery.

* Participants could select up to three options for this question



“We all got similar situations...we might not know how this person is feeling in that exact moment, but we can kinda figure out a bit more than others might, which I really like.”

Project participant

WHAT THE EVIDENCE SAYS

Evidence from the Centre points to a range of health and wellbeing benefits of structured music and singing interventions, in particular, reducing loneliness, anxiety and depression in older adults. For vulnerable groups, singing in a collective setting appears to facilitate relationship-building and increase engagement with the community. Among healthy adults, being a member of a music ensemble can also enhance subjective wellbeing and may provide a vehicle for identity construction.

We know relatively little about what works to improve the wellbeing of carers, despite this group's consistently lower wellbeing compared to the national average. **In 2019, 81% of carers declared they felt lonely or socially isolated as a result of their caring role and felt nearly twice as anxious as the general population.** In **other evidence**, social loneliness, defined as the quality and quantity of social relationships, has emerged as a key theme in studies of informal caring. Some of its likely causes are the restrictions imposed by the caregiving role itself, including reduced personal space as well as relationship deprivations and a sense of powerlessness.

Carers' Music Fund grant-holders have designed their projects using **existing evidence** on the mechanisms that help reduce loneliness: the creation of meaningful relationships, tailored support and reducing stigma. By targeting carers across age groups, the projects can improve our understanding of the experiences of loneliness in young people and people of working age and shed light on how participatory music-making activities can benefit their wellbeing.



"We need studies and evaluation that look at the experience of loneliness in children, young people and people of working age so that we can understand if different activities help people at different stages in their lives".

What Works Centre for Wellbeing

THE TEST-AND-LEARN APPROACH

Spirit of 2012 is committed to using standardised wellbeing measures to demonstrate the value of their funding. Through the programme's Learning Partnership, they've ensured the Fund will generate useful and usable data on personal wellbeing and loneliness outcomes.



"Our participants talk a lot about feeling low or desperate and this often seems to be in connection with their relationship to the outside world"

Fund Project Lead

Carers' Music Fund projects are encouraged to work iteratively by delivering "terms" of weekly music-making sessions to four different cohorts of women and girls. The "test-and-learn" approach and cohort structure embraced by the projects is about taking stock and refining engagement and delivery strategies throughout the course of the programme. The potential for learning is huge given the broad range of carer groups taking part, including young and new mothers, recently arrived refugee groups and women living in rural communities.

HOW WELLBEING IMPROVES: the Carers' Music Fund Theory of Change

In the Fund's programme evaluation framework, the personal wellbeing of female carers is thought to improve once a series of core wellbeing outcomes are achieved. The Theory of Change below developed for seven grant-holders⁷ shows the process of change experienced across participants.

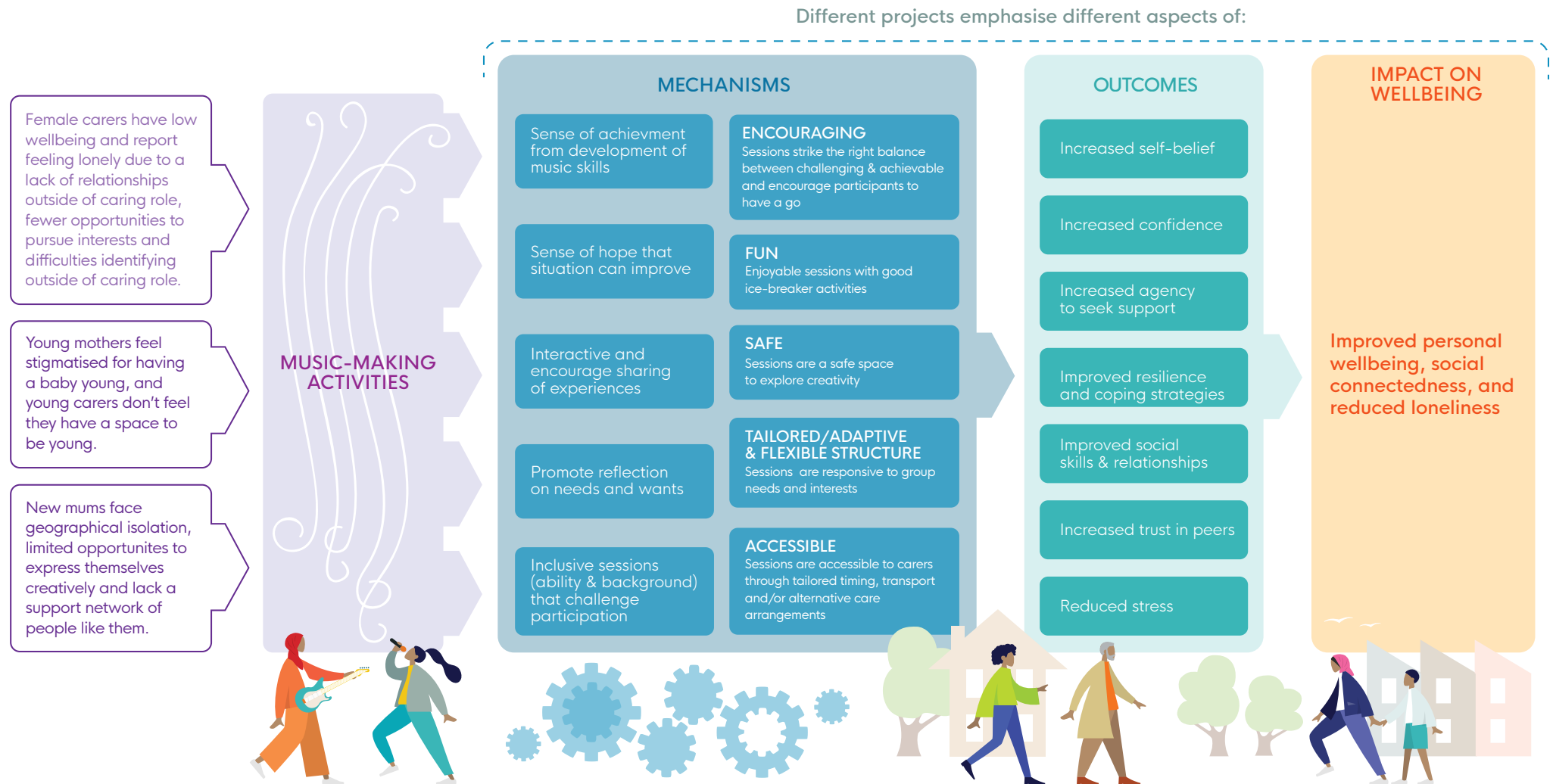
Starting from the left-hand-side, it describes the personal circumstances and factors that help explain the low wellbeing and social isolation experienced by carers as they progress through a 12-week programme of activities.

Project mechanisms become enablers of positive change and lead to improved levels of wellbeing, reduced loneliness and an improvement in social connections and relationships in the longer-term.

⁷ The aggregate Theory of Change was developed by WWCW using the project-level Theories of Change developed by the Behavioural Insights Team for 7 grant-holders and the programme-level Theory of Change developed by Apteligen.

Figure 1: Aggregate Theory of Change for seven Carers' Music Fund projects

How does participating in music-making activities impact the wellbeing of female carers?



CAPTURING INSIGHTS THROUGH THE LEARNING LOOP

To test the effectiveness of music interventions Apteligen has been supporting grant-holders to track the progress of their participants, from when they first engage, to when they complete the programme. By using standardised survey questions, Carers' Music Fund projects can begin to understand how the subjective wellbeing, social isolation and emotional experiences of loneliness affect female carers and how they compare to others in the UK.

Outcomes data was collected from 287 female carers across 8 projects. Partly due to the new challenges to data collection posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, complete data was only obtained for 51 participants, making it hard to paint an accurate picture of the wellbeing outcomes generated by the Fund at this stage.

Thanks to the Carers' Music Fund's test-and-learn approach, we know that grant-holders have faced significant challenges in the recruitment and retention of their participants. Key findings in early evaluation data suggest carers are a particularly difficult group to engage in participatory activities. In general, vulnerable groups may find the completion of questionnaires excessively burdensome and organisations themselves sometimes struggle when discussing topics such as loneliness with their participants.

Despite these challenges, the learning loop built between evaluations at the Carers' Music Fund project and programme levels has helped grant-holders generate invaluable learning on the deep-rooted emotional and practical barriers faced by female carers and better target their efforts. Adapting messaging to highlight the women-only focus of their activities and being sensitive to cultural norms are key mechanisms of change that Carers' Music Fund projects have begun to incorporate into their activities with subsequent cohorts.

THE CARERS' MUSIC FUND: more about the grant portfolio

Of the **10 projects**⁸, seven are in England, with one each in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. In Ipswich, Bury St. Edmunds and Lowestoft, Noise Solution is delivering a digital music making project to young carers, focusing on both one-to-one music mentoring and collective music-making.

In Birmingham, Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), through partnerships with Midland Mencap and Quench Arts, is engaging a range of their existing groups who focus on areas such as mental health, disability and specific cultural communities, while also trying to reach those who may not consider themselves to be carers.

Over in Hull and East Riding, My Pockets work with mixed groups of carers around the theme of 'Monster Extraction' – supporting them to identify, and banish, their personal 'monsters' through music, while new mothers in rural locations outside Inverness, including recently arrived Syrian refugees, will work with Feis Rois to write lullabies for their babies which will be professionally recorded.



"One of the aims of the Loneliness Strategy is to remove the stigma associated with loneliness and enable people to talk more freely about it. The questions [loneliness measures] could be a useful way to do that, with the right support in place to continue the conversation."

ONS Office for National Statistics 2018

⁸ The 10 organisations funded by the Carers' Music Fund are: Blackpool Carers Centre, Jack Drum Arts, Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), My Pockets, Noise Solution, Northamptonshire Carers, UK Youth, Oh Yeah Music, Feis Rois and Barnardo's. Projects will run until December 2020, followed by a three-month evaluation period up to the end of March 2021 agreed as an adaptation to COVID-19 pandemic.

THE CARERS' MUSIC FUND: GRANT PORTFOLIO

Partner	Project	Location	Outline
Barnardo's	Project Alaw	Wales Merthyr Tydfil	The Alaw Project aims to reduce those known, negative, social, educational and emotional impacts associated with girls and young women in a caring role for parents/carers, siblings and children. Through the medium of music and a series of workshop programmes, girls and young women in a caring role in Merthyr Tydfil, will have the opportunity to engage with others to learn skills and improve their self esteem and social confidence.
Blackpool Carers Centre	Bang the Drum	England Blackpool	Bang the Drum is a project that will harness the creativity, power and impact of music to bring a new dimension to the respite offer for female carers of all ages. Blackpool Carers are delighted to be able to work in partnership with the prestigious Grand Theatre in Blackpool, music specialists and therapists, to explore music related activities which will culminate in unique performances by carers of all ages.
Fèis Rois	Tàlaidhean	Scotland Ross-shire	Fèis Rois will be working with mothers across Ross-Shire to create new Tàlaidhean (lullabies). Local musicians will collaborate with new mothers in Dingwall, Ullapool, Alness and Inverness, to create bespoke lullabies for their babies, ahead of a final performance and professional recording of the music created.
Jack Drum Arts	Sound Out	England County Durham	Jack Drum Arts will deliver a rich and varied project developing musicianship, confidence, and connectedness for female carers in the region. Participants will work with professional musicians to explore Rock, Folk, World, and Choral music in venues around County Durham, with opportunities to attend and perform at high profile festivals and events throughout the life of the project.
Midland Arts Centre (The MAC)	Hidden Voices	England Birmingham	In Birmingham, the Hidden Voices programme led by the Midlands Arts Centre aims to provide creative, inclusive, person-centred music making opportunities for female carers within diverse communities across the city. Through strategic partnerships with Midland Mencap and Quench Arts, Hidden Voices will engage with a range of existing groups who focus on areas such as mental health, disability, and specific cultural communities, while also trying to reach those who may not consider themselves to be carers. Training underpins the entire programme with opportunities for carers, musicians and evaluators to develop specialist skills so they can continue making music in the
My Pockets	Monster Extraction	England Hull & East Riding	A creative project based on an idea that when we have conflict in our lives a monster is created. These monsters hide in the objects and buildings around us hoping that we will, one day resolve our problems and set them free. Female carers in Hull and East Yorkshire will work with My Pockets to write music that will tell the stories of the monsters in their lives.
Noise Solution	Beat Syndicate	England Ipswich, Bury St. Edmunds, Lowestoft	Noise Solution delivers music mentoring to people facing challenging circumstances. Evidence shows that if we positively impact on wellbeing we get better health, social, education and engagement outcomes. Beat Syndicate is a digital music project for young carers, exploring the impact of both one-to-one music mentoring and collective music making.
Northamptonshire Carers	MyMusic Northamptonshire	England Corby, Wellingborough, Northampton, Daventry	MyMusic will build upon the hugely popular Northamptonshire Carers Choir to create a project involving percussion, music technology, and song-writing. The team will run tailored sessions for four different groups of women: 50+ carers who have already joined a choir, young carers aged 7-17, families where there are mothers and daughters splitting caring responsibilities between them, and women caring for a loved one with dementia.
Oh Yeah Music	Women's Work	Northern Ireland Belfast	Women's Work is an annual festival coordinated by the Oh Yeah Music Centre in Belfast. It is designed to celebrate the contribution that women make to music, but also to wider society, using music to remove barriers, increase confidence, celebrate diversity and develop talent. This project is an outreach strand of that programme and will engage with four groups of women and girls from different backgrounds that have caring responsibilities for children and loved ones. This project aims to develop confidence, reduce loneliness, build friendships and further develop music skills through a series of musical activities bespoke to each group. The ambition of the project is to showcase the musical results of two of these groups through either performance or the creation and recoding of songs, while the other two groups will enjoy an opportunity to engage in a series of music tasters in a social setting over a period of time.
UK Youth	Sound Creators	England Wigan, Bolton, Hertfordshire, Hillingdon, Somerset	Sound Creators offers young female carers opportunities for fun, creative expression and (re)discovery of self through music making. The programme provides opportunities for young carers to engage in social activities with their peers and improve their wellbeing and resilience through music. Led by UK Youth, with music curriculum created by My Pockets, Sound Creators addresses the worryingly low levels of wellbeing and high levels of social isolation and loneliness amongst young female carers in the UK and supports them to express themselves through the production and creation of music.



Suggested citation

What Works Centre for Wellbeing (2019). *When we sing it sounds like there are more of us: Findings from the first cohort of the Carer's Music Fund*. CMF Insight document series. Spirit of 2012



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