JOURNEY LGBT+ ASYLUM GROUP

2023

Performing with pride

(12th December 2023)

We are immensely proud of the Journey members who contributed to the Pride Face project, a collaboration with Sampad.

Seventeen of our members took part in Saturday workshops at the MAC, exploring art, craft, movement, wellbeing and performance. It all culminated in a fun and moving performance at the Hexagon Theatre to an audience of invited guests.

Many thanks to director Ash Mukherjee, along with workshop leaders Kiera Saunders and Darren Abrahams. Thanks also to Sabra Khan and James Vegnuti at Sampad for providing a safe space for our members to explore and express themselves.

There's more about the project on the Sampad website, including video interviews with our members and a blog post by Alex, one of our directors.

Our members said:

“Thanks from the core of my heart to all of those who gave us such a safe platform where we expressed and showed our inside reality and thoughts. I got a lot of encouragement and boldness to say to the world I feel proud of who I am."
“It was a wonderful time. It was so helpful to me. I really want to thank Ash for your wonderful way of teaching and all members of the group. We had a wonderful time together.”
“I want to express my gratitude for patiently sharing your experiences with us. Your tolerance of our differences and the joyful moments you've created mean a lot.”
“Thank you all for your support so that we can be ourselves and celebrate pride on a daily basis. I am proud of who I am.”



Learning to tell our stories

(11th December 2023)

Last week, three of our members took part in a training session to help them speak out about asylum and visa difficulties. The training was organised by Status Now 4 All, and supported by Migrant Voice.

We'd like to extend a big thank you to Loraine Mponela from Status Now 4 All and Migrant Voice for supporting our members in this way.

Our members said:

"I found the training very helpful and a lot of information about how to tell our story as migrants to people so they can understand us and help us."
"I understand now that people have no idea of my life story. When telling my life story I should explain clearly for them to understand and feel my pain to get their support with policies, so that my life will be treated in a more humane way, given rights to live, work, go to school and live a dignified life."

"I'm very glad to be part of this meeting. I feel lots of confidence now when I speak in front of people."



Sheila, Winnie, Loraine, Virginia and Hafiz

Theatre trip

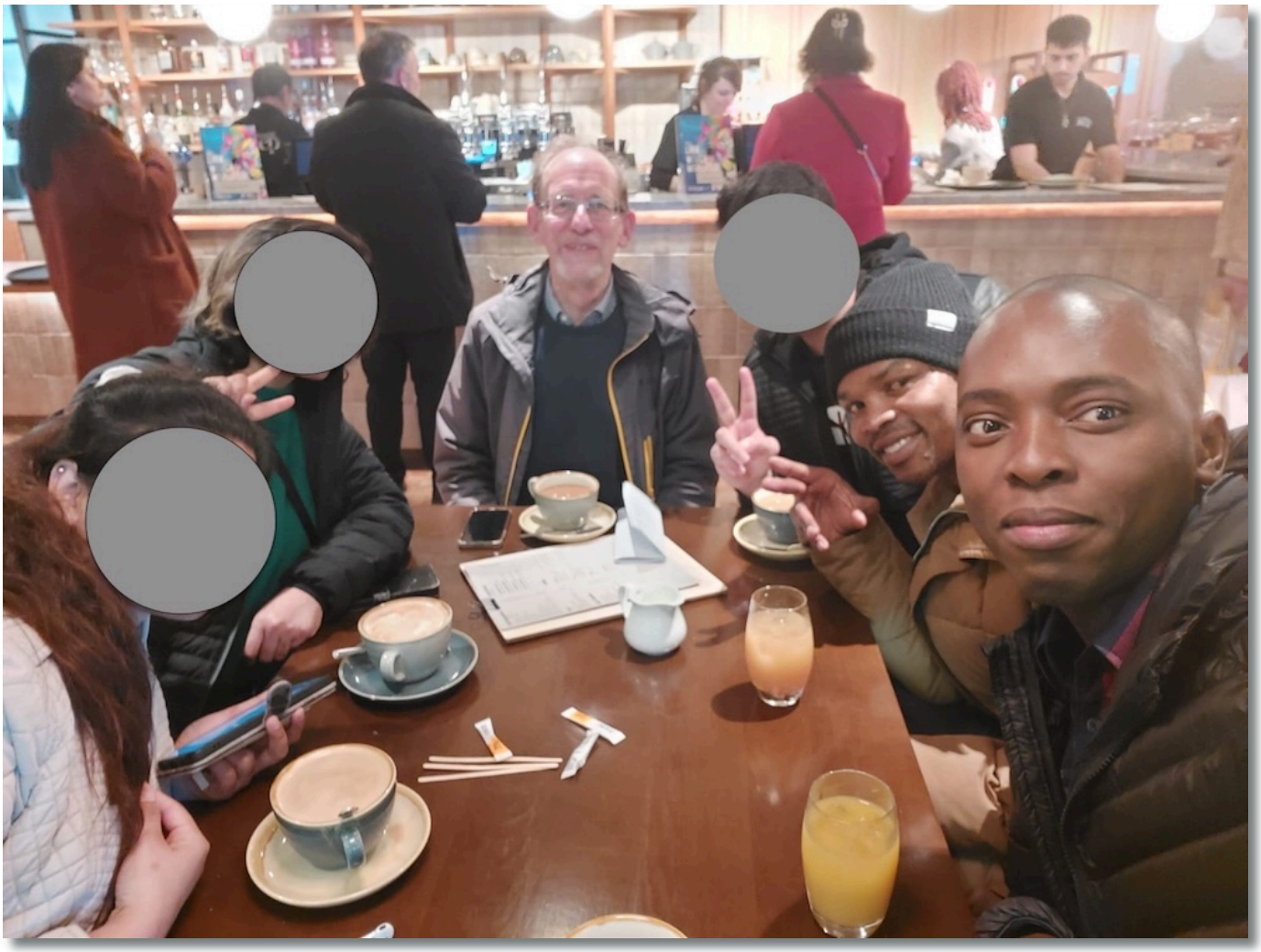
(23rd November 2023)

This week, volunteer Phil went with some of our members to watch 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' at Birmingham REP. The show is an adaptation of the book by C S Lewis, where four children go through a wardrobe into a magical land, and team up with talking animals to battle the evil White Witch.

We're really grateful to the REP for offering our members free tickets, and giving them the chance to experience this highly acclaimed stage show. 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' is running until 28th January. Book your tickets here.

Our members said:

"This play about Narnia was amazing, wonderful. I will never forget it."



Reaching higher

(17th November 2023)

On Tuesday 24th October, we were delighted to host a higher education workshop for our members with Rosy and Huw from Refugee Education UK. Our members face a unique set of barriers when trying to access education in the UK. This workshop focused on highlighting these challenges, explaining the UK education system and its levels, explaining how to apply to HE with international qualifications, and dispelling misconceptions and worries around the application process.

Members also shared their own experiences and resources they have found to help support their journey as asylum seekers in applying to higher education. Rosy and Huw addressed concerns over funding, translation of qualifications, accessing UK ENIC, and where to go for scholarships - and shared some useful tips and tricks. After being able to discuss each of their own specific situations, our members left feeling ready to apply to university.

Our members said:

"The workshop was good. It was informative and helpful. I learnt what things I need to get admission into a university."

"It was a great learning opportunity, most questions were addressed, and personally I found clarity on all the grey areas I had. It was really helpful and insightful about the requirements needed for admission into higher education in the UK, the application process, and how to look for funding opportunities, among other things."



Spreading the word

(16th November 2023)

On Wednesday, Alex visited Brushstrokes Community Project in Smethwick to talk to their service users about the Journey group, and the support and activities that we can offer. It was great to find out more about what the Brushstrokes team does, and to hear from other support organisations in the region, including Sandwell Adult and Family Learning Service, West Midlands Police, Black Country Healthcare, Fircroft College and Migrant Help.



Pride Face launch

(29th October 2023)

Twelve of our members joined artist Ash Mukherjee for the first session of our Pride Face project this weekend. This collaboration with Sampad will involve workshops of art, music, movement and mindfulness, leading to a public sharing of work in December. Check back at the end of November for details of dates and times.



Celebrating a successful year

(22nd October 2023)

This week Journey held its annual celebration and AGM - and there was a lot to celebrate. Over 60 members attended, with guests from support organisations Micro Rainbow, Sampad, Restore and the Refugee and Migrant Centre.

We gave a big round of applause for the 24 members that, since our last AGM, have been given leave to remain in the UK. There were also big thank yous for our Buddies and volunteers, and many of our members spoke about the activities they've taken part in, including Birmingham Pride, the summer picnic, the bluebell walk, the Bike Project, Pride Face and Digbeth First Friday.

Phil officially stepped down as a director, after many years helping to lead the group, and Alex stepped into his considerable shoes, joining Sheila and Jon as the directors for the forthcoming year.

Overall, it was a joyful and enthusiastic celebration of a great year for the Journey LGBT+ Asylum Group.

Our members said:

“When I came here I was very shy and sick, I had no confidence to speak. Now I come here and speak in front of everyone.”
“I thank the Journey group for recommending the Bike Project where I learned how to ride a bicycle and where I also got a bike buddy.”
“I found a chosen family in the Journey group and enormous support during the asylum process.”
“We had lots of activities we didn’t expect. It was really funny, it’s good for mental health, and physical health. I think everybody should take a chance and come and join, because you’ll never forget it.”





A Journey word cloud created at the AGM by our members

Out and proud

(30th August 2023)

Birmingham Pride is an important fixture in Journey's annual calendar of events, but our members also took part in other Pride events this summer, celebrating other aspects of their identities.

In July, Avril took part in London Trans Pride. She said: "It was really amazing to see so many trans and non binary people all gathered together, getting along so well just because we were celebrating our freedom and marching for our rights. It was an amazing feeling of companionship and union all together. It was really one of the best celebrations I have ever experienced. It made me feel so happy, cared for and protected, because despite how our situations might be, we are here for each other for love, support and understanding, and that's all we need."

In August, several of our members travelled down to London to attend UK Black Pride. Melvin said: "Pride to me signifies freedom and a sense of identity. We do not have this event in my home country. I went because it is fun and I get to meet new people. The ambience, celebration and organisation in general was amazing. As an African, Black Pride was special to me because I felt like was home. Meeting other Africans and black people of different nationalities and background was fantastic. I look forward to attending more Prides."



Marina and Etah at UK Black Pride

Live and learn

(25th August 2023)

Our August meeting was very educational - literally! Ehsan and George from Refugee Education UK came to talk to the group about opportunities to study at college. They gave an overview of the education system in the UK, the different levels of study, and which courses are available to asylum seekers and refugees. There were also group discussions, opportunities to ask questions, and a chance to talk in more detail after the meeting.

Our members said:

“Thank you for inviting the Refugee Education team yesterday. It was very useful and helpful and they did an excellent job.”
“I got advice that with my current access diploma I should just apply direct to university, and search for places with funding or sponsorship. Meanwhile I can start any free course, including English, at colleges near me. Thanks for inviting them.”



Park life

by Sian Finn

(18th August 2023)

On 12th August, we held our annual picnic at Cannon Hill Park. Twenty of our members and seven volunteers enjoyed an afternoon of games and fun. This included obstacle challenges, ball games and building blocks. There was also a game of rounders, and a game involving a multicoloured parachute. It was a lovely afternoon with laughter, fun and food. The samosas went down a treat, and we even managed to dodge the showers, staying mostly dry until the end of a great afternoon in the park.

Our members said:

"Lovely weather, amazing people, and yumm food. Everything was perfect."
"It was a very very refreshing picnic. I really enjoyed it. Thank you all."
"I really enjoyed the food and games. The great thing was I got a chance to catch up with people, so it's been a lovely day."
"I had fun as always, the games were epic, and I can't wait for our next picnic."



That Friday feeling

by Kwaku Appiah

(14th August 2023)

On Friday 4th August, our volunteers led a trip around the exhibitions, performances and live music of Digbeth First Friday - an event that happens in different spaces around Digbeth on the first Friday of every month.

The trip started in front of Moor Street Station, then we walked towards Centrala, where the event was going on. The first room we entered was like a television station. I loved how the cameras were roaming in the room, the screens also showing everything going on there. We were all on the television and I experienced how they operate in TV. It was really marvellous.

We then went into another room, which was really scary with different lights and screaming like a ghost. It had different pictures and a skeleton costume. I talked to the person in charge there, and he told me the story about them. He's said to me, in history, long long ago, they were some people who ate their flesh and drank their blood. That's Halloween. It’s a big historical event in the UK.

There was also an art gallery in another room, and I drew a big tree with many branches and fresh leaves. I choose a tree because I remember there was tree in my village at the road side. Everyone coming from the farm or anyone carrying a load, when you reached the tree, you will rest there, because that tree had big shade around it, and fresh air blowing there anytime. I called that tree Sanctuary Tree, because it saves people's lives. That tree is Birmingham to me, because it is a city where you can seek sanctuary, and is a city of different cultures. The people in Birmingham are so lovely, cheerful, supportive, so kind. I left my drawing with the host of that part.

Thank you to our volunteers for such a great trip, especially Adi, Sheila and Shukri. It really helped me.

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This video from the Digbeth First Friday trip was filmed and edited by Journey member Allen.

Our members said:

"This trip made me learn a lot."
"It was a great evening visiting a part of Digbeth I didn't know."
"Today was such a cool and new experience for me. I really appreciate it."
"It was good and refreshed my mind."

Contributing to research

(26th July 2023)

This week, ten of our members took part in a focus group for a research project by Migration: Policy & Practice. The study aims to gain a better understanding of the barriers faced by migrants to Birmingham and the Black Country. Researchers Trish and Andy encouraged our members to talk about their experiences - positive and negative - of accessing housing, legal support, health care and work. Their comments will contribute to a report, which will be published in October. The overall aim of the project is to improve integration for migrants to the Midlands.



Spreading the word

(16th July 2023)

Refugee Week was a busy time for Journey. As well as the Inclusive Gathering meeting (see below), we also had a stall in Birmingham's Centenary Square as part of a 'Get Together for Compassion' event. The day was organised by Birmingham City Council, and brought together a number of asylum support organisations to meet, share information and spread awareness. Throughout the day, our Journey volunteers spoke to all sorts of people, including useful contacts, potential volunteers and potential new members. If you were one of them, we hope to see you at a meeting soon!



Creating, informing, inspiring

(14th July 2023)

Ten of our members were invited to share stories of strength and courage at an Inclusive Gathering event in June. The Journey members gave personal testimonies, led songs, showed pictures and screened videos to raise awareness of their experiences, as part of Refugee Week. Our members, all regular attendees of Inclusive Gathering meetings, were also given a grant to cover the cost of providing delicious home cooked food from around the world. Everyone left well nourished in both body and soul! Inclusive Gathering Birmingham is an LGBT+ affirming Christian group which meets at 3pm every Sunday at the Loft on Bromsgrove Street, B5 6GR. Everyone welcome.



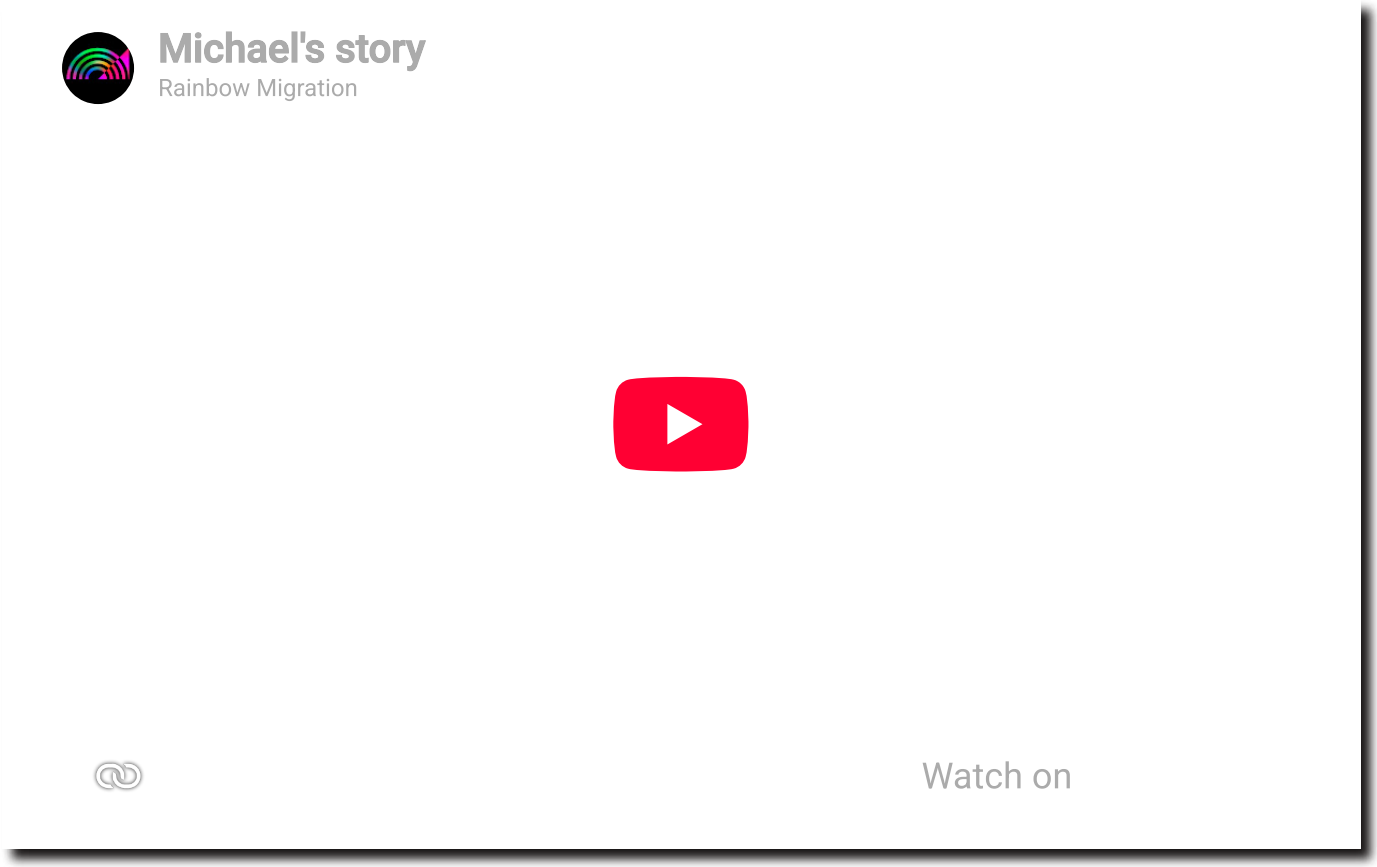
Michael's story

(1st July 2023)

As part of the #BeProudBeYourself campaign, for Pride season 2023, Rainbow Migration came together with Micro Rainbow and Refugee Action to highlight the voices of LGBTQI+ people who have refugee status or are seeking protection in the UK. One of our members, Michael, spoke about his experiences, and the support that Journey gave him after he arrived in Birmingham.

Michael said:

"It was quite awesome, because they also understand, for asylum seekers, the need to have these evidences."



What makes you feel safe?

(26th June 2023)

Our Pride Face project, a collaboration with Sampad, kicked off this weekend at the MAC in Cannon Hill Park. Ash Mukherjee led eleven of our members through a series of activities - movement and games, reflective and creative - to explore ideas of safety, happiness, strength and peace. The work that was produced and shared will inform a further series of workshops in September and October, leading to a public sharing in November. A huge thank you to Ash, and to the members that came along. We can't wait to see what you all come up with!

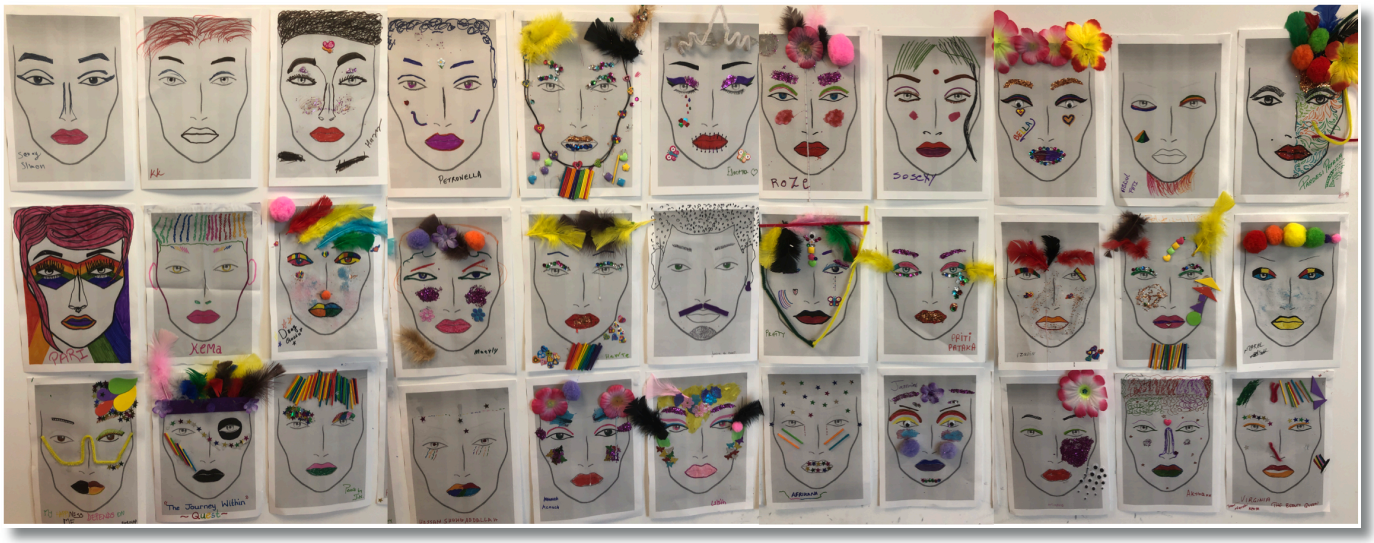


Getting crafty

(15th June 2023)

We had a special guest at our June monthly meeting - performing artist Ash Mukherjee. Ash invited our members to take part in some movement and craft activities as a taste of what to expect from our forthcoming 'Pride Face' collaboration with Sampad for SHOUT festival. The session culminated in a display of all the wonderful Pride-themed faces our members created.
You can see some more photos from the session on Ash's Instagram.





Celebrating with Pride

(4th June 2023)

Our members were bedecked in rainbows to celebrate Birmingham Pride last weekend. Not only did they march in the parade, but they also made the press, sharing their stories with the Express and

Star and the Birmingham Mail, and featuring in a video report by I Am Birmingham.



Shop to support us

(2nd June 2023)

Kings Heath Action for Refugees is supporting the Journey group through the sale of merchandise in their online shop. A proportion of the sales of these gorgeous tote bags will be donated to Journey.
There's loads of other great stuff, from pin badges to t-shirts to cookery books, so go and take a look - and get shopping!



Welcome to our new website!

(1st June 2023)

If you're reading this, then you've found the Journey LGBT+ Asylum Group's new website.
We hope it will help LGBT+ asylum seekers and refugees in the West Midlands find the group, and give potential volunteers, the press and potential supporters more information about who we are and what we do.
What do you think of our website? Let us know!

JOURNEY LGBT+ ASYLUM GROUP



JOURNEY LGBT+ ASYLUM GROUP

SUPPORT ACROSS THE BIRMINGHAM REGION

Who are we and what do we do?

The Journey LGBT+ Asylum Group is a support group for LGBT+ asylum seekers and refugees in Birmingham and the West Midlands.

We provide a welcoming, safe and supportive space, building confidence and a sense of community to asylum seekers who identify as LGBT+.

We offer information, signposting and support through the asylum process and settling into the UK.

The Journey LGBT+ Asylum Group is a registered CIO (charitable incorporated organisation), number 1212001. It is organised entirely by volunteers.

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