

What Midwest Study Data Tell Us About Youth as Young Adults

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Commission on Children in Foster Care

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My Purpose Today

- Present new data on outcomes experienced by young people making the transition to adulthood from foster care
- Point out some implications for policy and practice of the varied experiences of former foster youth in transition

Midwest Study Design and Sample

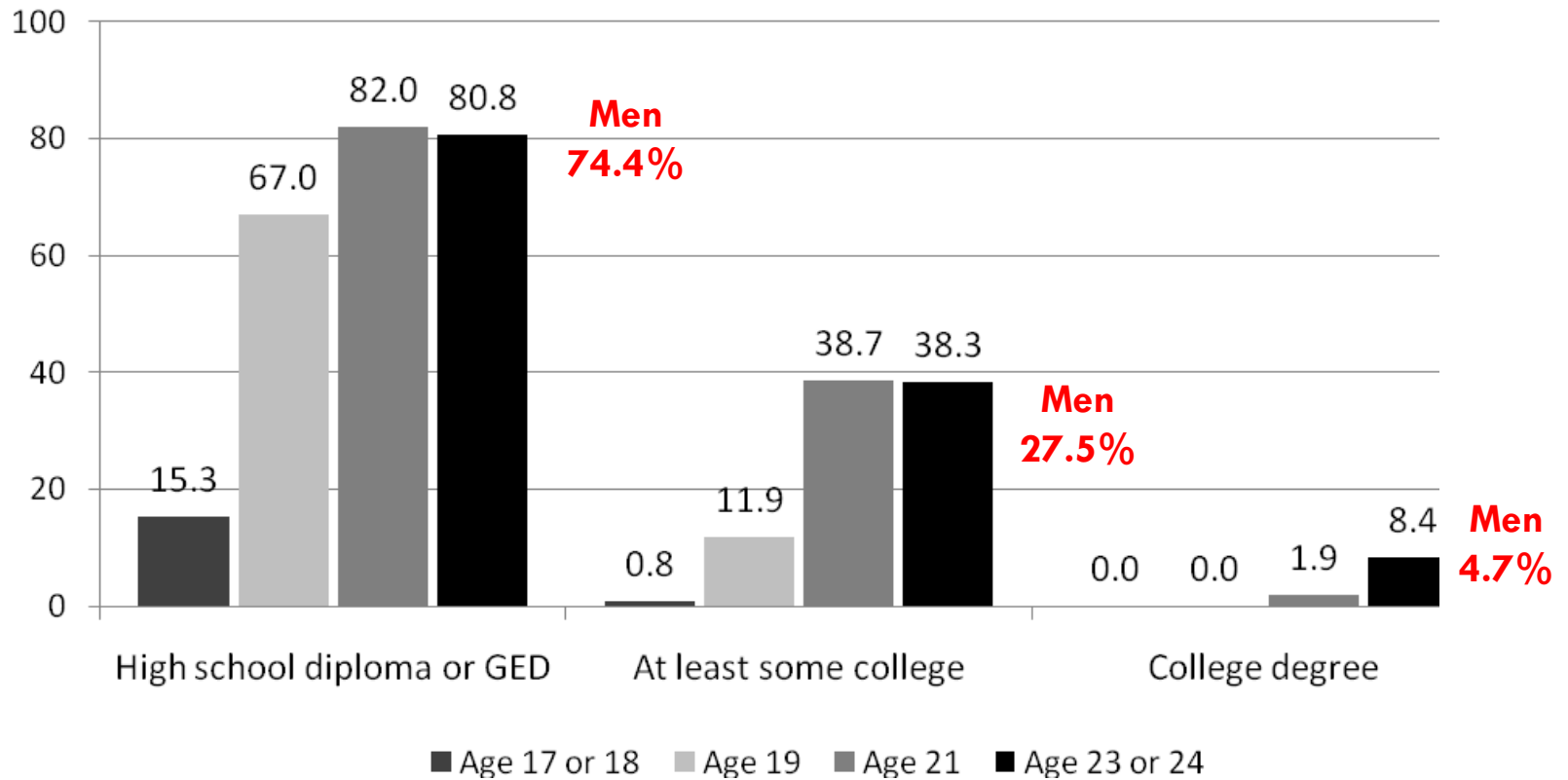
- Largest prospective study of foster youth making the transition to adulthood since the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999
- Collaboration between state child welfare agencies and the research team
- Foster youth in Iowa, Wisconsin and Illinois who:
 - ▣ Were still in care at age 17
 - ▣ Had entered care before their 16th birthday
 - ▣ Had been placed in care because they were abused, neglected or dependent
 - ▣ Not originally placed because of delinquency
- Data from in-person interviews (structured and in-depth qualitative) and government program administrative data



Trends in Transition Outcomes

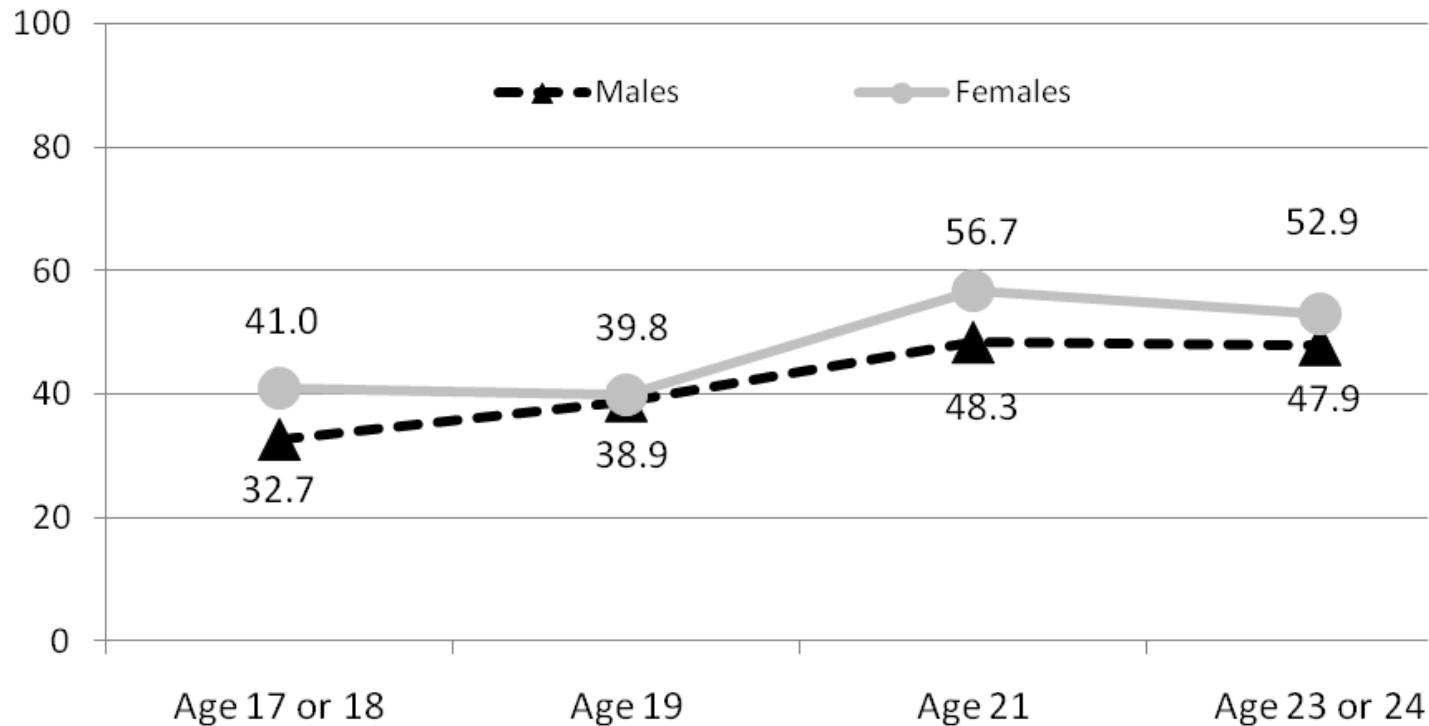
Young Women's Educational Attainment

Figure 1. Trends in Young Women's Educational Attainment



Young Men's and Young Women's Employment

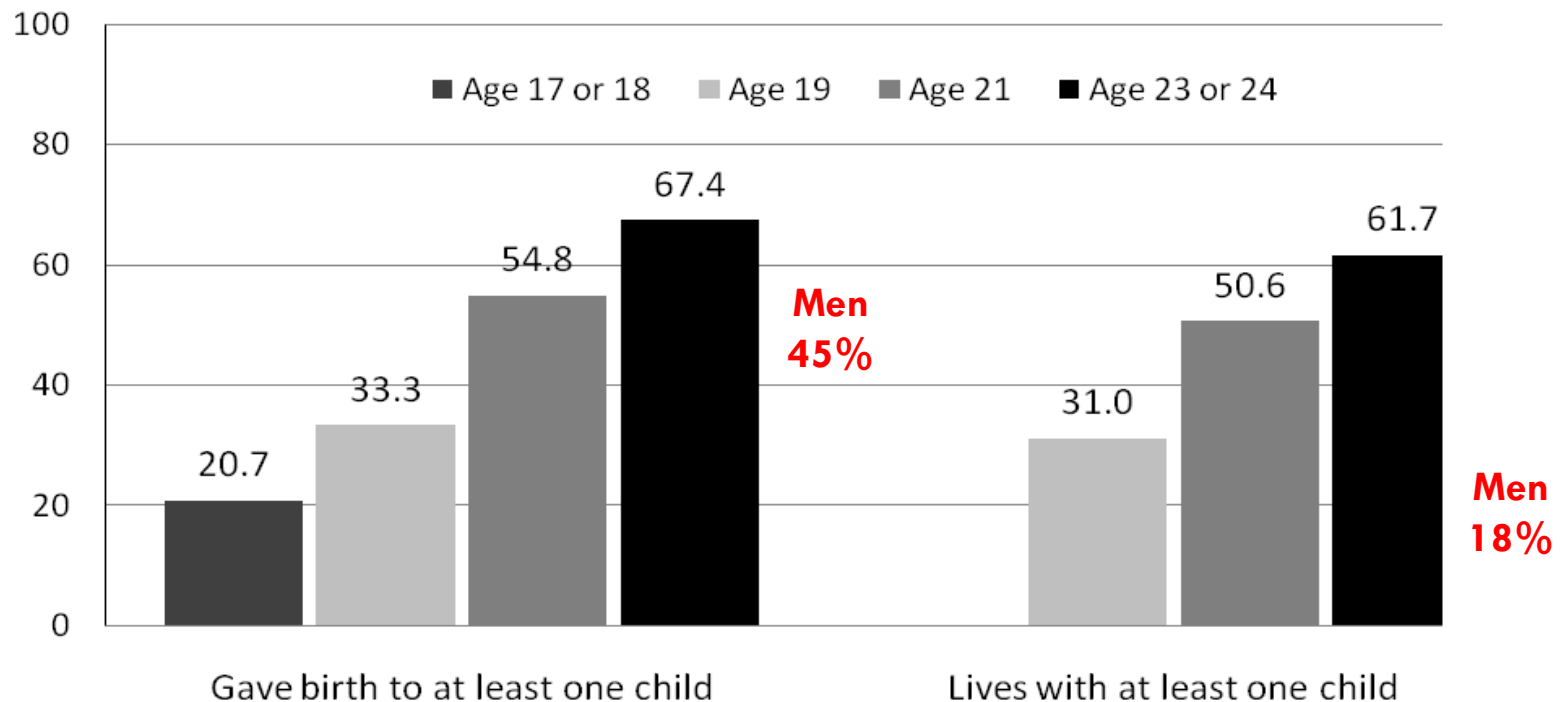
Figure 5. Trends in Current Employment by Gender



73% employed during year; mean earnings among employed = \$12,064

Parenthood Among Young Women

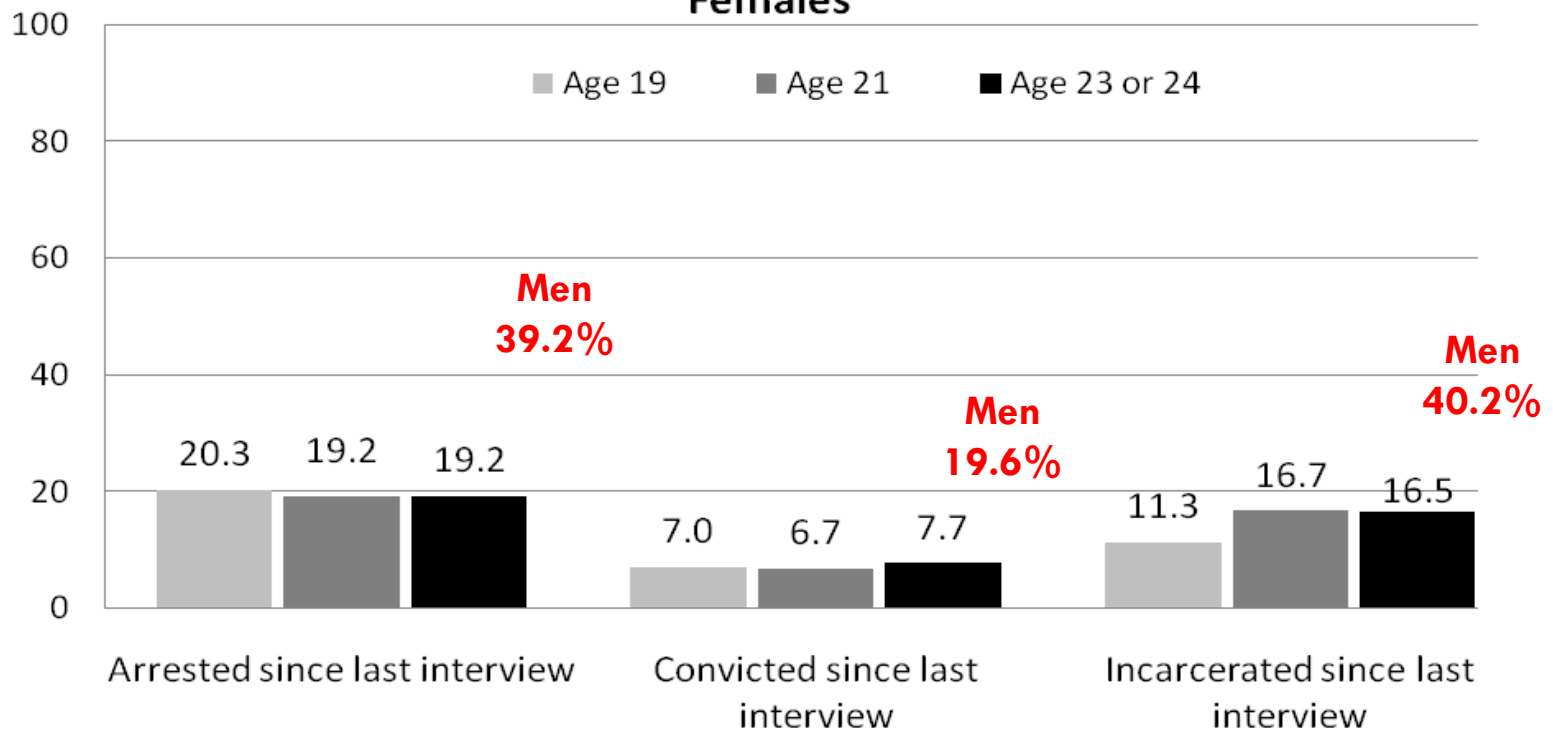
Figure 8. Trends in Parenthood among Females



17% of women and 61% of men
with children have a nonresident child

Young Women's Criminal Justice System Involvement

Figure 10. Trends in Criminal Justice Involvement among Females



Women: Arrested since age 18 = 39%

Convicted since age 18 = 18%

Men: Arrested since age 18 = 64%


Convicted since age 18 = 43%

Summary of Early Adult Outcomes Post Chafee

- Outcomes are relatively poor across a variety of domains
 - ▣ Declining engagement in education
 - ▣ Gradually increasing but poor engagement in the workforce
 - ▣ Many non-resident children
 - ▣ Troubling levels of justice system involvement continuing through early 20s
- Despite a sobering picture overall, many young people leaving the care of the state do well
- Outcomes vary:
 - ▣ By gender - males fare worse
 - ▣ By state – Illinois extends care to 21

Summary of findings on extending care from 18 to 21

- Evidence suggests that extending care:
 - Increases college attendance
 - No more likely to have a degree by age 23-4
 - College attendance, even with no degree, is associated with higher employment and wages
 - Increases wages (above effect of college attendance on wages)
 - No more likely to be employed
 - Decreases risk of pregnancy among young women
 - 40% decreased risk of pregnancy between age 17 and 19
 - Delays homelessness
 - 30% still experience homelessness upon exit, but at an older age
 - More research needed on severity of homelessness spells



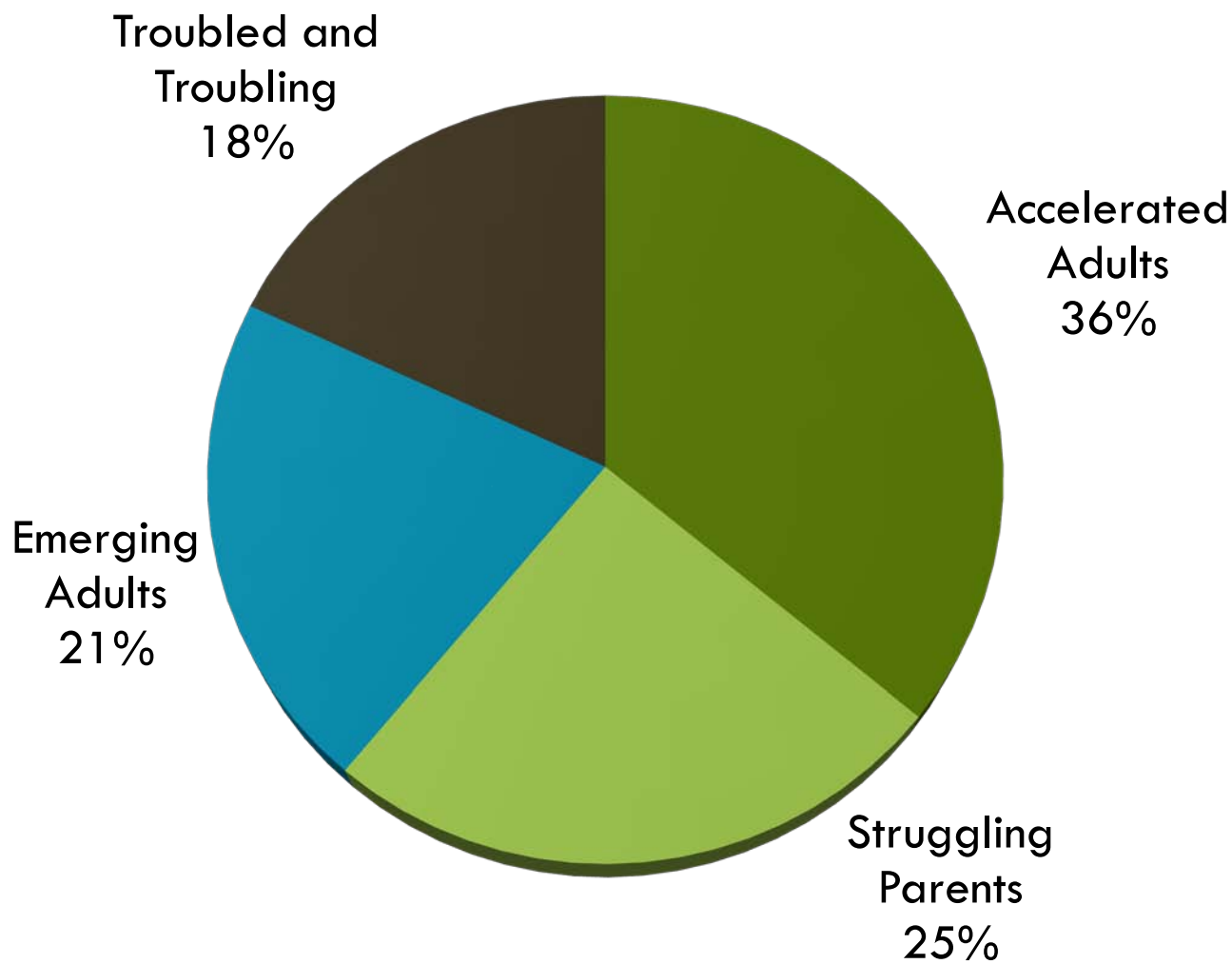
Heterogeneity of Youth in Transition: Transition Subgroups

Subgroups Provide More Clarity for Policy and Practice

- Current study using key transition indicators to classify youth at age 23-24 (n = 584) using LCA:
 - ▣ living arrangement
 - ▣ educational attainment
 - ▣ employment
 - ▣ resident and non-resident children
 - ▣ convicted of a crime

Four groups

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Group 1: Accelerated Adults (36%)

- Most are female (63%)
- Most likely to live on their own in fairly stable situation
- Almost all (98%) have a HS degree or more; 52% have some college
- Most likely to be currently employed
- Nearly half (46%) has resident children
- Relatively low rate of conviction (14%)
- Group does not stand out on other indicators of functioning (e.g., social support; health; MH and AODA problems; economic hardships)
- **Summary: This group is most likely to have made key transitions relatively early in adulthood...84% are “connected”**

Group 2: Struggling Parents (25%)

- Most are female (74%)
- Nearly all (91%) have resident children and relatively few (8%) have a non-resident child; they parent 55% of all resident children
- About equal numbers have their own place (46%) or live with relatives/friends (44%)
- Most likely not to have a HS degree (44%) and only 3% have any college
- Only one-quarter currently employed
- Lower than average rate of conviction (14%)
- Also...least likely group to be currently in school, most likely to be married or cohabiting, second lowest reported social support, and most likely to experience economic hardship
- **Summary: This group's experience is dominated by their parenting, under difficult circumstances...38% are "connected"**

Group 3: Emerging Adults (21%)

- Slightly over half are male (55%)
- All are living with friends, relatives, or in other settings that are not their own
- Vast majority (91%) has finished high school and they have the second highest rate of having at least some college (46%)
- They have the second highest rate of current employment (63%)
- They are least likely to have children (27%) and over two-thirds of those with children have non-resident children
- Lowest rate of conviction (6%)
- Also, they are least likely to have ever been married, to have ever dropped out of high school, and to have ever been homeless
- **Summary: This group most resembles Arnett's (2000) "emerging adults" in that they are delaying some transition markers (e.g., living on their own; finishing school; having children) while generally avoiding hardship...68% are "connected"**

Group 4: Troubled and Troubling (18%)

- Vast majority is male (83%)
- Are most likely to be incarcerated, otherwise institutionalized, homeless, and/or to have experienced high residential mobility (72%)
- Two-fifths have not finished high school or GED and only 11% have any college
- Least likely to be currently employed (10%)
- 48% have non-resident children and none have resident children; they account for 41% of all non-resident children
- 82% report a criminal conviction since age 18
- Also, least likely to have felt prepared to be on their own at exit from care, most likely to report mental health and/or substance use problems, lowest reported levels of social support, highest rate of victimization, four-times higher rate of non-violent crime and doubled rate of violent crime compared to other groups
- **Summary: This group experiences a wide range of psychosocial problems and poses challenges to the community...30% are “connected”**

Implications for Implementing the Older Youth Provisions of the Fostering Connections Act

- Distinct subgroups at the age of majority and during early adulthood suggest the need for targeted policy and practice
 - ▣ *Accelerated and emerging adults* mainly need support making the transition to higher education and employment providing a living wage
 - ▣ About one-fifth, *troubled and troubling*, needs significant intervention, perhaps for many years, with a range of psychosocial problems
 - ▣ Parents as a distinct group, particularly *struggling parents*, need distinct kinds of support



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