

HOW TO PUT YOUR COMPASSION INTO ACTION: THE HANDBOOK

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About this handbook

This handbook was created by Hannah Green, Communications and Campaigns Manager at City of Sanctuary UK, with contributions and assistance from Jonathan Ellis, Ben Margolis and Katherine Maxwell-Rose. Illustrations by Holly Thomas.

City of Sanctuary UK coordinates, supports and grows networks of welcome for people seeking sanctuary. From community groups to schools and universities, local councils to libraries and theatres, we work with individuals, groups and organisations in every area and in every sector to encourage inclusivity, solidarity and compassion for people from a forced displacement background. Published July 2023

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You are part of a movement



This handbook is about harnessing the power of the City of Sanctuary networks in order to speak up for refugee rights.

The power of our networks is down to the tens of thousands of individuals who step up every day: the teacher working at a School of Sanctuary, the midwife involved in our maternity programme, or the volunteer at a local City of Sanctuary group. The steps laid out in the following pages are about recognising the power we each have and then channeling that into building a fairer and kinder society. From sharing your values with family members to organising community events, this is about ongoing democratic participation beyond the single act of putting a cross on a ballot slip - because real democracy is about getting out there, standing up for what you believe in and speaking up for the values that you live by.

No previous experience is necessary, we'll guide you every step of the way.

This has never been more important. Increasing humanitarian and climate crises mean there will be more people seeking sanctuary - but hostile rhetoric has led to divided communities and a sharp rise in far-right activity. How we treat people seeking sanctuary reflects who we are as a country, and right now we're at a critical moment. It's going to take all of us to change the story.

One of the main reasons why misunderstandings and stereotypes about refugees persist is because people often lack direct contact and personal connections with people seeking sanctuary themselves. Our Theory of Change is built around the idea that if people have the chance to come together and recognise their shared humanity, they are then more likely to stand up for each other's rights. Compassion turns to action.

The Speak Up For Sanctuary programme is about supercharging this idea. We hope that this handbook will give you the tools and confidence you need to stand up, speak up and turn your compassion into action.



Why Speak up for Sanctuary?



Sometimes the smallest things have the biggest impacts.

Political systems come and go, so if we're going to achieve real lasting systemic change in the way people seeking sanctuary are treated, it will be by shifting public attitudes. Nothing can be achieved if we exist in a polarised, them-and-us climate where we're unable to effectively speak to our family members, neighbours, colleagues or change makers who hold differing opinions to our own. We think a crucial part of shifting public attitudes is down to having conversations. LOTS of them.

We're living in times where people trust very few sources, but they do often trust the people they know. What our friends and family think has a huge impact on how we vote. In fact the biggest factor in the seismic shift in <u>US attitudes on equal marriage</u> was people having gay friends or family members, and worldwide its been seen that <u>children are changing their parents' minds on climate change</u>. It's clear that when done well, conversations can bridge divides.

Shouting down our opponents or reeling off facts and stats clearly isn't working - we're living in staggeringly hostile and divided times. So instead, to push forward constructive and positive change, we need to paint a different picture - and we do that through a focus on locality, shared values and human stories. This enables people to effectively listen and speak from the heart to people who may hold a different position from them.

It's been shown than just <u>a single ten</u> minute long conversation encouraging actively taking the perspective of others can markedly reduce prejudice for at least 3 months. So one of the best tools we have for change is free and accessible to everyone.

This is not about winning arguments, it's about bridging divides.

For the most part, we're not talking about refugee rights enough. Maybe we feel overwhelmed. Maybe we fear how people will respond. Maybe we just don't think we have the power to change things. But if we're to build a kinder and fairer world, then we need to get talking.

Having meaningful conversation is at the heart of The Speak Up For Sanctuary programme. This strategy informs a series of tangible, accessible actions that we then encourage everyone to do.

From writing to your MP and attending hustings to running community cohesion events and making connections with local press. But in each instance, we're encouraging people to focus on locality, human stories and shared values because that's where real impact can be had.

Strategy: Speaking from the heart



Everyone has a story Why do you care? Our passion is our power

You do not need to be an expert to make a difference. You don't need to know everything about a specific issue, you don't need to have hundreds of facts and stats - what's more important is to understand why you care about those issues.

This is about telling our own stories. In order to do that, we need to ask ourselves why we believe what we do.

- What experiences in your childhood or adulthood made you aware of life's injustices?
- What made you feel passionate about refugee rights?
- Which stories stirred you?
- Why is it important for you to do something?

These stories are not only compelling to others, but they are a good motivator to ourselves to keep going.

We can take it for granted that we care, but knowing the true origins of why we care can be a great source of inspiration and energy when fuel is low in the tank.

You don't have to have an impressive story for it to have impact. Most people don't. But still recognise it's power as a way of connecting with others and conveying your values.

Changemakers like MPs and candidates receive tens of thousands of cookie-cutter template letters facilitated by organisations, so when they receive an original, heartfelt letter from an individual they stand out.

Activity

Take five minutes to answer a few of the questions listed above. Take a quiet moment alone and write down your answers down either below, on your phone or in a notepad so you can look back at them later down the line.



Strategy: Changing the story



Facts alone don't change minds Don't repeat the myth Plant a seed of doubt

When we're countering opinions different to our own, misinformation or damaging rhetoric, facts alone don't change minds. Instead we need to change the story totally.

This is a real skill, but something that we all should practice in our daily lives, in our social media posts and in the way we communicate with changemakers.

It's been shown⁶ that when we repeat what we are trying to discredit, we further reinforce it. So whilst it's tempting to bust myths, by doing that we're only giving those myths more airtime. Instead, we need to paint a different picture - and we do that by leading with our shared values. These values might be ones of family, friendship, justice, equality, and social harmony.

Example



Statement: "Why don't they stay in France?"

Response: "I suppose I'd ask myself what safety looks like to me. Sure it's an absence of danger, but it's more than that though. It's about feeling comfortable and accepted, being with friends and family, having opportunity. I wouldn't really feel safe if I was alone in a country where I couldn't speak the language and didn't know anyone. Comparatively, very few people come to the UK, but the ones that do often have family connections or can speak the language so know that they can get to work quicker. I know I'd definitely do the same."

This response leads with safety, something we all universally value. It talks about the situation from a first person perspective, making it feel more personal and less theoretical. It does make use of a fact, but not in a heavy handed way, and instead leads with relatable emotion.

This will work best when it's in your own words, leading with your own values and stories so it feels authentic.



Strategy: Changing the story



This exercise is not about winning arguments. It's about how to connect to an issue through shared intrinsic values.

It's best practice to always assume that people share the same values as you, this way you will make your values seem like the norm. It is also very likely that you do have the same shared values, most of us do, it might just be that right now the other person's values may have manifested differently. But by recognising the values you both share - your love for your children, your respect for your parents, the importance of your community - then immediately you begin to start breaking down division.

Thinking about it in these terms will change the way we approach these conversations. It's about talking about why you believe in this issue, why you care, and what values you are leading with. Right now people trust very few voices, but we do listen to the people that we know. So every conversation counts.

We're championing conversations which are fundamentally kind, fundamentally human - even if you disagree on the subject of migration.

It's unlikely you're going to change someone's mind after one conversation. But what you can do is plant a seed of doubt.

This means that when that person encounters another person who shares their values like you did, that seed might begin to germinate, and little by little, conversation by conversation, that seedling will grow into something significant.



Strategy: Getting others onside



Actively talk Normalise compassion Tell human stories

Now we're feeling more confident about talking about why we care - and now we want others to care too.

Whilst this is of course about encouraging others to think and act in a way that is supportive of refugee rights, it's also about normalising compassion. We can *reactively* change the story - this means when someone says something wrong or misinformed, we can gently present a different perspective using the techniques we've just learnt, but we can also *actively* change the story.

For many people, the only stories they hear relating to people seeking sanctuary will be on the news, which are often unsympathetic. So it's up to us to actively talk about refugee rights and to actively present a positive alternative.

The more we talk about why this is important to us and why people seeking sanctuary are an asset to our communities, the more we normalise these positions.

So how do we actually share what we believe with the people we know?

What we actually do often has more impact than what we say.

If we volunteer or campaign in the refugee rights sphere or have hosted someone seeking sanctuary in our home then you are living by example - this can be really impactful to the people around us.

These activities are also the most obvious starting point for any active conversations we have. Talk to friends and colleagues about these experiences - not just about what you did, but how it made you feel.

Exercise

Challenge yourself this week to actively raise these subjects with someone who you wouldn't normally share these things with. Loosely prepare how you will bring up the subject of refugee rights. Notice how the person responds. What could you do differently next time? How did it make you feel? This is a process that will improve with practice.



Strategy: Getting others onside



It's not just what we say that's important, but what we also encourage others to say.

If we want to step this up we must reach out into our communities and make connections with neighbourhood associations, faith groups, and unions. At City of Sanctuary we work with mainstream organisations like schools, universities, local councils, arts organisations, libraries and more - so if you need support in getting these organisations onside, or if you work for one of these organisations and want to do more to promote welcome, then reach out to us.

This can be about making connections with like-minded people and encouraging and supporting them to speak out too. A business owner may never have spoken out about refugee rights before, but

with your encouragement and support they might. This encouragement could be in the form of a fact sheet, an invite to an event, meeting with someone with lived experience, or the opportunity to sign a campaign letter.

Your City of Sanctuary group can be a catalyst for social change. With a little handholding, the movers and shakers in your community could be valuable messengers in the fight for refugee rights.

Authenticity of expression is key: a head teacher may want to focus on access to education, a business owner may want to look at the right to work.

It's sensible to acknowledge that the challenge isn't easy. But if we are to bridge divides, build cohesion and to provide safety to those who need it, it will take all of us.

Exercise

Spend five minutes thinking about who are the movers and shakers in your community - both groups and inviduals. Who has influence? Who do people listen to? This could be trade unionists, town councillors, business owners and other employers, teachers, faith group leaders, neighbourhood associations, libraries or arts venues? Now ask yourself, who do you have connections to or could get connections to? Now its time to think about how to approach them. This is all about relationship building, how can you initially get their attention? This could be an invite to an event you're holding, asking for an informal meeting, or by flagging a specific campaign which correlates with the industry they are in, for instance the Lift The Ban campaign calling for people seeking asylum the right to work, or the Families Together Campaign calling for better family reunion laws.



Strategy: Calming conflict



Stay calm Find common ground Why is it important to you?

You're not going to win everyone over. Trust your gut. If someone feels very set in their ways, politely leave them to it.

When it comes to the public's views on people seeking sanctuary, you can roughly split society into three categories: about one quarter are actively pro-refugee, a similar proportion are determinedly antirefugee, but in between there's a 'mixed middle' of around half the population with more ambivalent views who can be 'won over' by either side.

These people are the ones who we can sway, so they are the ones we should focus our energy on.

Don't dismiss someone's concerns. Listen to them and meet them where they are rather than where you want them to be.

Try to understand what made them think this way. You are unlikely to change someone's mind after one conversation. Instead, this is about calmly showing a different perspective, leading with shared values and planting that seed of doubt.

Try to find common ground, and then use your own experiences to explain why you care. Our sense of sense is extremely malleable, so when we can find common ground the person we are talking to is less likely to focus on our differences.

Keep it local. Talk about local examples of solidarity, or even local examples of people experiencing racism, that lodges the discussion in a familiar and understandable place.



Exercise

Practise bridging techniques which calmly change the direction of a conversation. Some examples:

- "I hear what you're saying. I think...."
- "I really care about this because..."
- "I respect your passion. I'm passionate too..."
- "I suppose I see things differently..."
- "I started to care about this when..."
- "We're both mothers/fathers, so we can understand that we'd do anything for our families..."

Always remember to protect your wellbeing, know when to walk away and recharge with friends and allies.

Small actions - big impacts Writing to MPs and candidates



Authenticity is key Less is more Focus on specific actions

We all know we should be reaching out to candidates and MPs, but how many of us do it regularly? It's time to start seeing it as a part of our normal routine. They represent us, or at least they want to, so it's important they hear from us.

In this context, it's important to recognise your own expertise, even though we're not the experts. The changemakers we're writing to are not often subject experts, they are expected to know a little bit about a lot of things, so you are very likely going to be more informed anyway. Own that.

Write from the heart. Pepper your letters with your values and the origins of why you care. Use your own experiences to paint an alternative vision - do you volunteer, attend community events or have you ever hosted a refugee family?

Look for points of connection with who you are writing with, even if they hold a

different position to you. Perhaps you are both parents or run small businesses - these can all be good ways of reaching across the divide.

In our letters and emails, less is more. Try and focus on one or two key issues, and try and always come up with something you want them to take action on. The person who reads the letter will be busy, so you need to catch their attention and keep it, so be simple and concise. You may want to think of ways to make your letter stand out. You could include a poem, a painting or a recipe.

Always do your research - if your MP already supports your cause instead ask them for ways that you can collaborate together, perhaps an event or a photo opportunity, in order to influence change.

If you receive a generic response, reply providing further resources. If your MPs provides a supportive response, be sure to monitor how they vote in parliament and if needs be, hold them to account later down the line.

Hear from an MP

"Hearing from constituents about why refugee rights matter to them is hugely powerful – whether it's about their values, own family experiences, the stories they have heard from members of their communities or in the media. Messages that speak from the heart and to humankind's better nature always make the greatest impact." - Caroline Lucas MP



Small actions - big impacts Connecting with local news



Platform your views Celebrate good news Look for hooks

Writing letters to newspapers, calling into local radio or featuring on regional TV is a chance to show that local people do care. This is a chance to lead by example and amplify a positive alternatives to hostility and then ensure it's seen by decision makers in your community.

Keep your eyes peeled for hooks. What is happening in your local area that might make what you have to say have more importance? This will increase your chance of being published and seen by more people.

Some examples

- If there's a marathon happening, you could use that as a hook to talk about the sports club you run for children seeking sanctuary
- If there's another series of Bake Off on the telly, you could use that to talk about how you have used baking and food to bring communities together with new arrivals
- If International Woman's Day is around the corner, use that to talk about a particularly inspirational person within your community
- If there's a tragedy in the channel, write to your local paper and talk about why you are moved and demand change

Keep an eye on the letters pages of your local newspaper, you can politely

respond to letters and articles and get a dialogue going in the town.

If you do run a group or volunteer, remember that most people will not know about your work and will find your general day-to-day of interest. Make connections with local journalists and invite them to your events. Celebrate your good work. Normalise compassion.

Relationships with journalists can be incredibly important. KentOnline¹⁰ improved its editorial policy on the language used when reporting about people seeking sanctuary after developing a relationship with local organisation, Kent Refugee Action Network.

Case study

When a far right group came to spread hate in a small Welsh town, they countered it by having a community event where they handed out Welsh cakes.

That community event was covered all over the news including the BBC. 11



Small actions - big impacts

Visual stunts



Local landmarks Media coverage Community events

Human stories capture our attention, but we don't have time to talk to everyone - so sometimes strong visuals can be a great way of grabbing people's attention and conveying our values.

Many of you will be doing these things anyway, but this is a reminder of the impact and importance of visual stunts. This can be as simple as having a THIS HOUSE STANDS WITH ALL REFUGEES 12 poster in your window. This shows clearly to your neighbours and community what you believe in. This is all about normalising compassion.

Perhaps your community group, local school or art club could create bold, eye catching banners and posters - display these in shop windows or in the town centre, join in local events, fetes and carnivals. This is a way of capturing people's attention and generating interest and curiosity about the issue, which can lead to greater awareness and understanding. Take inspiration from what others have done before.¹³



Using your new contacts with local press, get coverage of these stunts. You can often achieve greatest impact by setting your stunt in a recognisable location, perhaps write messages of solidarity in the sand on the local beach etc, anything that roots your messaging to a sense of place rather than just an anonymous concrete background.

This makes it feel like you are speaking for the community - Birmingham stands with refugees, rather than just this group stands with refugees. Again this is about normalising compassion, reaching out beyond our echo chambers and showing that the hostility pushed by government does not represent us the people.



Stepping it up: events



Bring people together Celebrate community Champion human stories

Events come in many shapes and sizes. The most important thing is bringing people together - this is an integral part of City of Sanctuary's theory of change.

You could organise your own event: an open day at your centre in order to showcase your work, a community picnic, a street party, a supper club, a friendly football match, even a litter pick.

Wherever possible, these events should be organised with people who have lived experience right at the heart.

Alternatively you could piggyback onto an existing event - rather than creating a buzz from scratch, use existing festivals, parades or other events to platform your values. For those of you who are part of groups and organisations, events are really important as they allow an insight into our work for people who may not know what we're up to. They are also a great way of building relationships with changemakers. It's also worth considering what we can offer the changemaker or candidate - it benefits them to be seen at events with young, vibrant people. Similarly, it benefits us to be able to share our values and capture photos of the candidate standing in solidarity with our cause.

Case study

Sanctuary on Sea, the Brighton and Hove City of Sanctuary group joined the world famous Brighton Pride parade in order to show solidarity with LGBTQI+ refugees and to stand against the government's hostile policies. By joining the parade they forged connections with other protest movements and their message reached people who may not have engaged with refugee rights issues before.



Stepping it up: meeting MPs



MP Surgeries

Most MPs hold surgeries once a week in their constituency to give people an <u>opportunity to</u> <u>meet them and discuss matters of concern</u>. Book your meeting and ask how long you will have. Before the meeting research do your research, prepare an agenda and a clear ask, and practise speaking. Be brief, clear and to the point and don't be afraid to tell your story and share your passion. You can take others with you, and if there are people who have lived experience of seeking sanctuary in your community who are happy to share their stories, this would be a great opportunity. After meeting someone with lived experience, MP Christian Wakeford <u>apologised in the Commons</u> for how he'd spoken about people seeking asylum, "I want to go on record and say what I said was wrong and I am sorry for saying it."

Canvassing

In the run up to an election you're likely to get doorstep or telephone canvassing. Don't be taken by surprise - prepare your elevator pitch. This should be just a few sentences setting out your major concerns and what solution you see that addresses that concern. An example: "I'm really concerned about politicians using inflammatory language that emboldens the far right and puts people seeking sanctuary at risk. Will you pledge to not use

dehumanizing rhetoric and will you call it out when others do?"

This isn't about out debating the other person, it's about explaining why this is an issue that means something to you.

Don't be afraid to speak to the candidate, if they're touring an estate, they may be at another house. Politely ask if you can speak with them, and share your points of view and experiences directly with them.

Hustings

Hustings are great chance to interact with candidates. They will be advertised in the local paper, online, on community notice-boards - don't miss them. Sometimes you need to submit questions in advance, sometimes its just a matter of putting your hands up, but find out beforehand so you don't miss the opportunity to speak. Go with a few concise questions prepared that aren't biased towards any candidate.



Case studies, stories and positive alternatives



Where possible draw on examples from your own life and community. Ask yourself who have you met that has deepened or changed your view? If this is not possible, here are just a few stories that you are free to draw upon. Even if the story isn't your own, be in control of the narrative by being clear why the story has impact for you.



Ali

Ali arrived in the UK from Iran in 2018 as a child refugee. Driven by his lifelong passion for acting, he has performed at the Globe and Leeds Playhouse. After noticing the lack of safe and creative spaces for people seeking sanctuary, he started his own social enterprise, <u>Babylon Project</u>, using creativity as a means to build community. He was voted Young Leader of the Year by Hammersmith & Fulham Council for his work raising climate change awareness and bringing attention to the ban on asylum seekers working through speaking at the House of Commons.

Cheese making in Yorkshire

After fleeing Syria, Razan and her family found safety in Huddersfield. Due to a lack of documentation and references, finding work initially proved difficult. Spotting a gap in the market however, Razan taught herself how to make halloumi cheese and has now runs a successful cheese business using local milk. The business, <u>Yorkshire Dama Cheese</u>, has won more than 30 awards and gained royal approval from Princess Anne.



SHAMPOO CHOCOLATE FRUIT FREE BESUT

A community steps up

When hundreds of people seeking sanctuary were held in Penally barracks in Pembrokeshire, the local community came together to offer support and friendship. The community had never done anything like this before, the human connections that were made dispelled any fearmongering, and they campaigned hard for the centre to be shut. Friendship turned into action. And they won!

Top facts and stats



You don't need to be an expert to talk with conviction about refugee rights. Here are just a <u>few key facts and statistics</u> to help you feel prepared and comfortable in your position. Remember that changing the story by leading with your values will usually have more impact that busting myths.

The UK is home to approx. 1% of the 27.1 million refugees worldwide. The UK takes far fewer applications than most other EU countries including Germany, France and Spain. Most people fleeing stay in their own country or neighbouring countries.

People do stay in France. France recieves and accepts far more applications than we do.

They are not all men, 67% are. Because it's such an awful journey and people think they can reunify if they can get one family member here to claim asylum.

Some people crossing are from Albania but the majority are from Afghanistan, Iran, Eritrea, Sudan, Syria.

There are almost no authorised and working routes for people to safely reach the UK. Since the Taliban takeover, only 22 Afghans have been given sanctuary through the UK government's resettlement route.

They are genuine refugees. Three quarters of asylum claims are granted protection at initial decision stage. That means our own government recognises that they are fleeing real danger and need our support.

People are not here for the benefits. Whilst people wait for a decision on their asylum case they are banned from working and get under £7 per day to cover the costs of their basic necessities.

People are housed in hotels because the government are not processing people's claims quick enough. Right now there are over 150,000 unprocessed asylum cases. If the government cleared the backlog there would not be a need to warehouse people in unsuitable accommodation like hotels.

Keep it going



Practise, practise, practise Get connected Think strategically

Talking about these subjects isn't easy. Reaching outside of our echo chambers really isn't easy. So the most important thing is to practise. When we encounter a changemaker, or a family member who says something misinformed, we don't want that moment to be the first time we try these things out - we want to feel comfortable and confident in that moment.

Can you start down this path with a friend? If you're not already in a City of Sanctuary group or another refugee support organisation, then see if a like minded friend wants to commit to speaking up for refugee rights with you. You can practice together and celebrate each other's actions.

TOUTIET'S actions.

Do you live in a strategically important location?

If you think your constituency might be a swing seat (a constituency seat which is won by only a small margin. This means that only a small swing of votes can result in the seat being lost to an opposing side) then supercharge your efforts to share your values and encourage people to use their votes to stand up for welcome and compassion.

Has your area experienced a surge of right-wing activity? Get connected with likeminded people and encourage those with influence to stand up for refugee rights. Counter hostility by working with your local media to platform good news stories celebrating community, welcome and solidarity.

Tell us about it...

We want to hear from you! Get in touch to tell us about how you're using the handbook and what results you're having from your conversations - good or bad! All feedback is useful.

Let us know what you think on: hannah@cityofsanctuary.org or via our Twitter, Facebook, Instagram or TikTok channels: @cityofsanctuary

Chart your progress



Standing up for what you believe in isn't a tick box exercise, but we all need a little motivation now and again. Chart your progress as you start on this journey. Talk to your friends and family about what your doing and don't forget to share and celebrate your successess with us.





Your story

Take some time to reflect on why you care and why this work is important to you.



Talk to a friend

Practise actively raising these subjects. Perhaps talk about what you've learnt in this handbook.



Connect with local media

Write an opinion peice for the letters page of your local newspaper.



Write to your MP

Be focused and have a clear action that you'd like them to take.



Prepare elevator pitch

Have an issue you can confidently talk about if a candidate were to knock on your door.



Get visual

Design a poster or banner for display in your window or workplace.

City of Sanctuary UK



Wherever we come from, we all have a right to feel safe. That's why city by city, community by community, we are building a more welcoming UK for people forced to flee their homes.

Since we started our work in 2005, we have been committed to making welcome widespread. Our vast network of local groups provide direct support and are building welcome within communities, whilst our work with mainstream organisations like schools, councils, libraries and more ensure that wherever someone seeking sanctuary goes, they are met with understanding, compassion and empowering opportunities. Together our networks provide support, dignity and welcome.

From small acts of kindness to big political change, this inclusive movement is building a better, fairer, kinder society - for everyone.

We're there every step of the way. From coordination, training and resources to unmissable webinars and collaboration opportunities, we do all we can to support and grow these networks of welcome.

We believe that a UK that truly welcomes refugees is possible. By bringing people together, celebrating our shared humanity and encouraging people to put their compassion into action, we can build strong, welcoming, cohesive communities.

Our networks offer a positive vision of welcome and hospitality to all. We create opportunities for friendship and solidarity between local people and people seeking sanctuary and we encourage partnership on common causes.

We promote understanding of asylum and refugee issues, especially by enabling refugee voices to be heard directly.

We celebrate and promote the welcome and contribution of people seeking sanctuary and engage with people seeking sanctuary in decision making processes at all levels.

<u>Visit our website to read our impact</u> <u>reports.</u>²⁰



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