

Ancient Stones, Untold Stories Evaluation Programme

Final Report

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CULTURAL CONSULTING NETWORK

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Contents

1. Introduction
2. Evaluation approach and methodology
3. Findings from CCN evaluation
4. Summary conclusions

1. Introduction

Cultural Consulting Network was commissioned in July 2009 to undertake the first year formative evaluation of Rochester Cathedral's project *Ancient Stones, Untold Stories (ASUS)*; as well as the development of a overall evaluation recommendations and guidance to frame on-going, in-house evaluation to assess the impact of activities and inform future planning. The evaluation was intended to assess how well Rochester Cathedral has met its three primary aims to (1) Improve the interpretation of the cathedral; (2) Increase visitor numbers and participation; (3) Improve accessibility.

Capital works to improve access and interpretation were completed and launched in September 2009. The main focus of the evaluation in year one from launch (October 2009-October 2010) was therefore to review changes and provide formative evaluation of the impact of various audience development, volunteer and partnership initiatives.

The priority outcomes for this evaluation were:

- Improve public understanding of the Cathedral's heritage and significance;
- Enable greater and wider public participation with Rochester Cathedral;
- Develop Rochester Cathedral's role within Medway communities and regeneration plans;
- Develop organisational knowledge and skills within Rochester Cathedral.

This work was carried out in the context of the completion of capital works and ongoing organisational change. Rochester Cathedral is a complex organisation going through a period of rapid development. Roles of staff and volunteers are being adapted and attitudes challenged. At the same time, it has been important not to lose the external focus, looking out to the local community and the Cathedral's many supporters and stakeholders. Through all this, good communication has been identified as the key tool for initiating and maintaining progress.

2. Evaluation approach and methodology

In order to develop a detailed evaluation programme, Cultural Consulting Network undertook a review of all existing visitor information, research and evaluation to ascertain a baseline of evidence from which to create a draft work plan for future research. The review focussed on

assessing which aims could currently be measured, quantitatively and qualitatively, which indicators already existed, the source of the evidence and identifying gaps in knowledge.

This review found that there was already:

- good general visitor research on which to build;
- good contextual visitor knowledge and understanding of general regional/local visitor market;
- good evidence of partnership working;
- a body of data held by the education team, informing the development and delivery of programmes;
- a good body of general knowledge about visitor profile and motivations.

The review suggested that Rochester Cathedral might usefully build up more information in the following areas:

- more focus on specific target groups, for example, disabled visitors;
- evaluation plans for general visitor activities and events;
- measuring the quality of visitor experience, with the inclusion of learning and social outcome measures such as values and attitudes, enjoyment;
- evaluation of the development of staff and volunteer knowledge and skills;
- ongoing monitoring of partnership work within the local community;
- more reference to the wider body of cathedrals' evaluation methodologies.

Following the review, CCN drew up evaluation work programmes for Rochester Cathedral staff and CCN, to cover the duration of the contract, the ASUS project and beyond. These plans formed the main body of the related recommendations for ongoing evaluation, refined following the completion of the CCN direct evaluation work. The main evaluation activities directly undertaken by CCN were qualitative:

- Direct evaluation of participation by local families in Family Fun Day;
- Discussion groups of education volunteers and welcomers;
- Telephone interviews with community partners;
- Telephone/email interviews with representatives of organisations undertaking group visits and joint projects;

- Review of data relating to development of work with special schools;
- Discussion with Rochester Cathedral staff (education and interpretation).

3. Findings from CCN evaluation

3.1 Evaluation of participation by local families in Family Fun Day

The main aims of this part of the evaluation were to identify how many children under 16 participated, to find out how many families were visiting for the first time and to identify some motivations for their visit. There was a secondary aim of collecting qualitative data on the visitor experience and their response to the Cathedral's major family event. The methods used were printed marketing stickers, a simple feedback postcard survey administered by CCN, self-administered family focus sheets and observation by 2 evaluators.

The number of children attending was found to be 213, approximately one-third of the visitor numbers. This was counted using simple stickers, given out at North and West doors by Cathedral staff. We would recommend this method as one that the staff and volunteers could use even on busy days with large numbers of visitors. The cost of the stickers would be balanced by the volunteer time needed to count children manually and the marketing effect. Use of stickers also ensured that each child received a personal welcome when they arrived.

Postcards were produced, featuring the image of a monk as used in Rochester Cathedral marketing. The card asked 2 questions: *Have you been here before? What made you come here today?* There were 66 completed cards, from a possible 100. This represented a sample of approximately 10% of visitors, which is likely to be a higher percentage of families, as all cards were completed by visitors in family groups. The survey showed that 15 families were new visitors to the Cathedral. This proportion of new visitors suggests that the Cathedral is extending its reach, without losing the core "repeat" visitors.

Although only two questions were asked, one of which simply required yes/no, a useful amount of qualitative feedback was gathered. It seemed that once respondents had answered the main question, many were inspired to say more. One person requested a larger form for his comments.

The volunteers responded positively to this approach, especially once they had had a chance to look at the cards more closely and had observed some of the comments coming

back. It was also possible to gain some insight into the effectiveness of the new outreach and marketing activity generated by the ASUS project. For example, 9 families had been attracted by the event itself and 2 had heard about the event through their children. About half of these “new” families gave unsolicited positive comments about the Cathedral within their response to the postcard, for example: *Our church warden told us it would be a fun day and it really is; everyone has been really welcoming and the children have had a fabulous time.*

This very simple method of data collecting could be used at future family events. The trial showed that not only was it effective in gathering specific limited information, both quantitative and qualitative, but in addition, it gave the respondents an opportunity to give more general comments. It is however important to note that the level of response was high because the cards were given to visitors in family groups by the evaluators, not left out for visitors to pick up and fill in. This is time-consuming but it is a simple task that could be combined with other welcoming duties.

Only 10 families chose to fill in family focus sheets (simple questionnaire) and the information collected added very little to the data from the cards. It is possible that this sheet would have been more appropriate for smaller and quieter events such as the Tuesday afternoon school holiday workshops, where families have less distraction from additional contemporaneous activities.

Observation by evaluators was useful to flag up possible access issues such as the need to make sure there is available seating near to activities that take more than a few minutes to complete. It also allowed them to track the dwell time of a few visiting families, one of which was extremely long - observed arriving at 10.35 am and leaving at 1.50 pm. The education team are already aware of the benefits of using volunteers as observers when running pilot sessions for schools and this could be extended to include other activities.

3.2 Discussion groups of welcomers and education volunteers

Two separate group discussions were held, following the same format. Volunteers and welcomers were asked to talk about the qualities and outlook needed to be a good volunteer at Rochester Cathedral. They were then asked to reflect on the changes to their work

brought about by the ASUS project and encouraged to share any issues and give more general comments. Both groups were very positive and constructive in their approach and demonstrated many of the qualities they considered important. Their responses showed a strong emphasis on interpersonal skills, team work and giving a very good service to visitors, based on respect and inclusion. The education team's approach was clearly one of enabling, rather than taking a more old-fashioned didactic role. They were all very aware of the benefits to themselves, as well as to visitors, saying for example: "*Every time you come in, you learn something new*" and "*I can now be part of the Cathedral, whereas before I just worshipped here.*"

Welcomers

This was a small group that could not be said to represent the whole large team (more than 70) of volunteers who act as welcomers. They were self-selecting, choosing to attend an extra meeting and as such are likely to have been the most positive in their attitudes to the new developments. In terms of the changes brought about by the project, the welcomers mentioned that they were a mixed group, with some more established members (but none of those present) finding it more difficult to adapt to the new ways of doing things and new management methods. However the members of the discussion group were themselves supportive of the changes and aware of the rationale behind them. They thought it was important to get the balance right between: being a tourist attraction and a place of worship; the needs of the regular congregation and the new visitors; offering quiet spaces and being welcoming to children. There was also some discussion about the difference between the role of a welcomer and that of a guide and whether it would be possible to progress from one to the other.

There were some potential pressures identified in terms of: space within the building; capacity of staff and volunteers; the fabric of the building (from increased activity). However, it was pointed out by one welcomer that the collecting of data from visitors' actual behaviour would enable the Cathedral to make changes based on information. "*We should be able to improve as a result of the statistics.*"

This was partly in response to discussion about logistical and practical difficulties which related to the position of the reception desk and the audio guides. It was accepted that until the work on the North Doors was finished, it was too early to tell which entrance was more

commonly used. However, if it is the West Door, then there are issues that would need to be considered further:

- people entering here often expect to be able to pay for an audio tour at that point;
- having to direct people to the North Door for audio tours makes it harder for welcomers to promote them effectively as “people wander off in between”;
- Better marketing of audio tours might help as people might arrive looking for them.

Audio guides are still a new feature and it was clear that more work needs to be done before the end of the project in order to get the best from them. The point was made that they do not suit every visitor and there would always be a need for “human guides” alongside. The welcomers have seen them used very well by groups for example, foreign students and would recommend the general tour and the reflective tour, but are less confident about suggesting to families that they should try the family tour. They explained the problems very clearly and as constructive criticism.

- Some people did not want to spend an hour or more following an audio guide. The reflective tour was sometimes recommended as it is shorter (but still 45 minutes);
- They were not clear how to decide which tour to recommend or to which visitors;
- They did not understand how, in practice, a family group might use the audio guide, or how many sets to recommend;
- They did not think a family would use an audio guide if other activities were available (especially if they were free);
- They saw the main problem as one of marketing, but there was clearly some anxiety about their success in income generating – would free admission be threatened if audio guides did not raise enough money?

This was a small and reflective group. In general, they seemed to have accepted multiple changes to their work with the understanding that the project was a positive development. Some change was already seen as embedded into their working practice, exemplified by this comment: “*What has now become normal we don’t see as a change.*” This view was further supported by the partner interviews, some of whom commented on how well the Cathedral was managing the change, and that welcomers and volunteers were taking on board changes as a result of which there was ‘less moaning’.

The main discussion started with the observation that communication needed to work better across the different groups and teams within the Cathedral. This was seen as a standard task for organisations of this size, rather than a pressing concern. The following discussion and their willingness to participate thoughtfully showed that future meetings of this sort would be a way of enabling this to improve. The Cathedral has recently established a Day Leaders' scheme, with 7 individuals identified as leading the team on specific days of the week. This new structure, with extra responsibilities for particular volunteers and a communication line to the Interpretation Manager, should improve the management of this very large group and give volunteers a smaller and more effective forum for discussion of key issues.

In addition, the Cathedral should consider introducing new mechanisms for responding to issues raised by the welcomers that can be shared across the whole group. This is so that they can be seen to be giving active consideration to suggestions or criticism even if they are unable to act on them, for example a FAQ briefing sheet updated twice a year.

Education volunteers

This discussion was with a very lively and positive group of volunteers who clearly understood the rationale behind the many recent changes, both to the physical environment and to their ways of working. This group represented a far higher proportion of their specific volunteer team, which is much smaller than the team of welcomers (14 core members). They recognised the opportunities for personal development provided by the project and felt supported in meeting the challenges it raises.

For them the most important aspects of the ASUS project were:

- More opportunities to get to know each other and learn from each other. This has been enabled by the provision of more formal training sessions for education volunteers;
- A growing team, leading to better relationship with visitors, volunteers able to learn new workshops and gain experience (encouraged by paired arrangements), more flexibility and variety (all do several workshops);
- The introduction of new projects such as dance/movement, special needs education, rhyming slang. It has been good to see the impact of the Cathedral on children. *"It is thrilling to be part of this!" "You feel Wow!"*;
- Increased practical activity, with new resources, like mirrors, binoculars, instruments. This provides a different experience for children and so it feels more worthwhile;

- Full-time manager for volunteers, which gives volunteers someone to refer to if there is a problem and they are encouraged to be part of the solution;
- New structures, improved organisation;
- Opportunities for volunteers to try out audio tours themselves and have a guided tour from one of the most experienced guides – *“we are much better educated and more knowledgeable”*;
- There has been a *“flow of new challenges”* and initiative is encouraged.

Another benefit for volunteers that was recognised within this discussion group links well to the Cathedral’s main aims for the ASUS project. They saw their work at the Cathedral as an opportunity to give something back to the community. This was summed up well by one education volunteer: *“It’s made us part of the community and the community part of us.”*

3.3 Telephone interviews with community partners

The research was conducted between 3rd and 14th May 2010 and involved a series of telephone interviews with organisations with whom Rochester Cathedral has been working during the life cycle of the HLF funded project. The sample of partner organisations that we contacted were a mix of local stakeholders, including members of the Rochester Heritage Interpretation Partnership (RHIP) and other community interest groups suggested to us by the Cathedral. The majority of the respondents have a relationship with the Cathedral that was begun before the project and which was planned to continue afterwards, which gave a helpful perspective on what kind of change in partnership had been affected through the new access and interpretation activities.

A series of qualitative questions were developed to illuminate whether, from the point of view of the partners, the project had strengthened the Cathedral’s role in serving local communities and whether the lessons learnt were being well shared by the Cathedral with its partners.

Contribution of the project to the Cathedral’s role within Medway communities and regeneration plans

The consultation with partners has clearly demonstrated that the HLF project has enhanced the Cathedral’s contribution to the local area’s community and regeneration plans in a concrete way. The Cathedral’s partners were of the view that the project was part of a

continuum that had started with the new strategic focus and outlook instigated by the current Dean five years ago. Many partners attested to the seriousness of the Cathedral's new sense of community purpose and its willingness to work with others by citing its establishment of the RHIP.

The new focus has created a much stronger and clearer sense of the Cathedral's objectives and a sense of its role in supporting the community life of Medway. The project was also seen by partners as a manifestation of the skill and commitment of the Cathedral's small professional team to realising the community objectives set by the Dean. The team were credited with being outward looking, good at listening to others, flexible, and willing to learn from and share good practice in working with local partners for the benefit of the Medway communities. Those partners involved in joint programming with the Cathedral stated that the project had strengthened the Cathedral experience in delivering partnership events and activities and has allowed the Cathedral to experiment.

The project has certainly helped to underline the Cathedral's view of itself as a key element of the regeneration plans of Medway, and in particular its contribution to the core tourism and arts offer with other local attractions. Those partners involved in the regeneration plans of Medway Renaissance complimented the Cathedral on its understanding of the Medway redevelopment context and its role in the physical and social changes taking place, for example links with new housing and the river developments with Chatham Historic Dockyard. The HLF investment has clearly, therefore, had a positive impact on the Cathedral's ability to contribute to and sustain local community and educational life, regeneration plans and tourism offer.

Sharing the benefits and experiences of the project with the wider community

At the time of writing, it is a little early to assess fully how effectively the Cathedral administration is sharing the lessons of the project with its partners, in light of the fact that the West Door access improvements cannot yet be properly evaluated. Based on past experience, partners were confident that the Cathedral would share lessons with others through its active membership of the RHIP. The review of other programmes and developments, undertaken as part of the wider evaluation plans, also provides evidence that the Cathedral is sharing the lessons learnt from the ASUS project, for example in audience development activities with uniformed groups being shared with other cathedrals. The

Cathedral's reputation for effective communication and its commitment to developing and sustaining mutually beneficial partnerships augurs well for the future.

3.4 Research with organisations undertaking group visits and group projects

The research was conducted during June 2010. It involved an email contact and questionnaire followed up by a series of telephone interviews (where possible) with individuals and organisations with whom Rochester Cathedral has been working during the life cycle of the HLF funded project. The sample of organisations that we contacted was a mix of different local and non-local organisations, including special schools, uniformed groups, specialist tour groups for visually impaired people and friends of other cathedrals, as well as local stakeholders involved in the Medway 2012 initiatives, with which Rochester Cathedral was involved as a direct result of HLF funding for additional educational work.

Consultation with those organisations undertaking group visits and joint projects has clearly demonstrated that the HLF project has increased and widened engagement with the Cathedral. It has also strengthened the role of the Cathedral in the community and raised its profile amongst different target audiences, such as uniformed groups.

The overwhelmingly positive feedback from those interviewed underlines the Cathedral's key strengths of communication, providing a friendly welcome, accessibility and user focus. This is manifested in the many ongoing relationships the Cathedral has established with both local partners and different educational and community groups. By funding additional capacity, expertise, marketing and audience development activity through the '*Ancient Stones Untold Stories*' project, HLF has enabled the Cathedral to widen and deepen its engagement with local and specialist audiences, enhanced the capital access and interpretation improvements and helped confirm the Cathedral as a core community and educational resource. As this is building on the existing core work of the Cathedral, and the dedication and expertise of its staff, volunteers and guides, there is every indication that the public benefits will continue to be sustained in the longer term.

3.5 Review of data relating to development of work with special schools

The education team provided information from their own formative evaluation of the new project-funded work with local special schools, including 5 teacher questionnaires, emails

and letters from teachers, thank you letters from pupils and notes from evaluation meetings. This internal evaluation could be set alongside the telephone interviews carried out by CCN (see 3.4 above) which increased triangulation and validation of the results.

From the questionnaires, it was apparent that the teachers involved in the piloting of the new sessions were generally very pleased with the approach, the welcome and the differentiation of content and delivery, matched to the ages and abilities of their pupils. There were some very positive comments, such as: *“You used a variety of explanations which met everyone’s needs.”* *“Many happy faces indicated how much they were enjoying the experience. I, for one, loved the prayers, sitting in the Cathedral – awesome.”*

The questionnaire, designed by the education team, included 18 questions and a free text comments section. Although this seems long, most of the questions could be answered yes or no. Interestingly, many of the teachers, who are likely to be very used to this method of evaluation, chose to use grading within their responses. Even with this small number of forms, read across was difficult, for example, is “spot on” the equivalent of “extremely”?

There were some useful comments within the free text comments. Teachers were more inclined to suggest improvements here than in 2 previous questions specifically requesting this information. The main improvements related to the physical environment, rather than the organisation of the session, although there were some suggestions for changes. This may reflect the needs of these particular children as children with autism, for example, may have specific sensory needs. Similarly, one teacher said that the use of the “emotion cushions” to evaluate pupils’ enjoyment may be less effective than the response would be to photographs of faces. One teacher included quotes from students and these were all very positive. Some less positive responses from individual children were explored in a follow-up email from a teacher. The value of this apparently more negative comment should not be underestimated. Possibly the standard questionnaire is less useful during development of new sessions.

Two areas of comment from teachers are worth discussing within the education team. The first centres on their references to the power of the Cathedral itself to affect emotion and affective learning and its impact as a setting for educational activity. It was described as “tranquil” by one teacher and “awesome” by another. The teachers were aware of the spiritual value of the visit and the relevance of this to their own work. This was also apparent in CCN’s interview with one of the “pilot” teachers. This is a unique selling point in terms of marketing to schools and the fit within the curriculum.

The second point was linked to the first by one of the teachers, who pointed out the possibility of more defined links to the Religious Education part of the curriculum and also commented that class teachers need to be able to “show evidence of learning.” This unprompted mention of learning outcomes show how far that way of planning and measuring progress is now embedded in some schools. Rochester Cathedral would be in a stronger position in terms of marketing school sessions as well as seeking support from external funders, if there could be a more obvious connection made with specific learning and social outcomes. As well as using them in the planning of activities, there should be reference to them in the implementation and evaluation. There are some suggestions for questions relating to outcomes in the related document “*Recommendations for ongoing evaluation*”.

It is recognised that teachers feel that they have little time to fill in forms and have to carry out their own time-intensive systems of record-keeping and measuring outcomes. In this context, some further consideration and possibly training, on the use and design of standard questionnaires might make the evaluation less time-consuming and more effective as a tool.

The process followed by the education team in developing these new sessions, particularly the level of consultation with schools, time given to reflection and formative evaluation has been a model of best practice. This is increasingly valued within the wider team at Rochester Cathedral and others are now able to build on this experience.

3.6 Further evidence of impact of the project (from discussion with education and interpretation staff)

Team working

This project has improved communication between staff groups, especially around programming. For example, audio tours need to be marketed with defined hours when they are available, so organ practice has to be scheduled at set times. The project has provided the momentum to address some conflict in roles, for example, between stewards and welcomers. There has been improved training and more direct management of volunteers, with new monthly meetings across teams. Welcomers are now considered to work much better with the education team.

Capacity to enter into local learning partnerships

The marketing budget prior to this project was very small. Investment by the Heritage Lottery Fund (which included £35k for marketing activities) has dramatically increased the potential for partnerships through matched funding and has allowed the Cathedral to raise its profile within the local community. For example, HLF funding has enabled the Cathedral to become involved in *Our Medway 2012*. As part of this project the local authority covers transport costs for pupils to visit local heritage. This has led to development of the relationship between the Cathedral and Medway Archives, as well as consolidation of relationship with the Guildhall Museum.

Similarly, Rochester Cathedral is now able to become a partner with BBC SE Learning on a family learning project this summer. BBC SE is funding the printing of a new trail, developed by the education team within HLF-funded development time.

The project has enabled the Cathedral to grow in confidence in terms of sustainability. It has demonstrated that opportunities for partnership and sponsorship will come up and that it is worthwhile investing time and energy in preparation, so that staff are able to respond creatively and effectively to new initiatives as they occur.

Acting as role model and mentor for other organisations

New work with uniformed groups has been funded by the project. Sessions have been developed linked directly to the badge requirements, in consultation with local groups and validated by Commissioners of Kent County Scouts. Two pilots have been held, with Cubs (Oct 2009) and Beavers (March 2009). A volunteer with extensive scouting experience has been leading on this, together with the education team. The forum of SE Cathedral Education Officers has become interested in this work and it has already been followed up by Chichester Cathedral. Interest is now growing nationally, with enquiries from Chester and Southwark Cathedrals.

Advice has been given to St Mary's Faversham, a church that had completed a successful HLF project to develop resources for schools, but needed help to make best use of them. A further application to HLF for an education officer was recommended and this has been successful.

4. Summary conclusions

A separate document sets out specific recommendations for ongoing evaluation.

The priority outcomes for this evaluation were:

- Improve public understanding of the Cathedral's heritage and significance;
- Enable greater and wider public participation with Rochester Cathedral;
- Develop Rochester Cathedral's role within Medway communities and regeneration plans;
- Develop organisational knowledge and skills within Rochester Cathedral.

It is clear from the qualitative evaluation undertaken that Rochester Cathedral is performing well against all these outcomes.

The English Cathedrals National Visitor Survey, commissioned by the Association of English Cathedrals, carried out among visitors to 38 cathedrals (Sep-Oct 2009) reinforces CCN's evaluation results. Findings showed high satisfaction ratings, with 71% saying that no improvements were needed. Almost twice as many people are open to coming back to Rochester Cathedral than the national average (35%) and 91% of Rochester city visitors said they would be likely to visit the cathedral if they visited Rochester again in the future.

The combined feedback demonstrates that the Cathedral is increasingly being seen in the community as a safe and special place, which puts people at its heart. For a relatively small organisation, compared to the larger cathedrals, it has been very successful in attracting funding for access and interpretation improvements, in balancing and developing its community, visitor and educational role and is developing good practice within its 'sector' of benefit to other Cathedrals.

4.1 Improve public understanding of the Cathedral's heritage and significance

The work of the Education Team has been expanded by this project and they have been able to extend the reach of the Cathedral's learning opportunities, both within the formal learning sector and more widely with the community, through work with groups and families. Feedback from families, groups and schools has started to demonstrate that there is a growing recognition of the importance of the Cathedral in terms of its heritage and its place within the community. Comments from parents and carers attending Family Fun Day were overwhelmingly positive, with many new visitors expressing an element of surprise in their

response. Regular visitors frequently mentioned the benefits their children were receiving from the Cathedral in terms of their learning.

4.2 Enable greater and wider public participation with Rochester Cathedral

The recent major events, such as the visit of Henry VIII to Rochester in Summer 2009 and the Family Fun Day in February 2010, have raised the profile of the Cathedral within the local community. Most importantly for sustainability, partnership work within Medway has been developed through the active participation of the Cathedral in shared local activity and projects, such as Medway 2012.

4.3 Develop Rochester Cathedral's role within Medway communities and regeneration plans

Research with partner and community organisations demonstrates that Rochester Cathedral has extended and deepened its role within the community, using the impetus of the HLF funded project to establish closer working relationships with community partners as well as widening access to the community as a whole. This role is seen as part of a continuum by both partners and the Cathedral and therefore likely to be extended in the future. The ASUS project has acted as a catalyst, rather than the sole reason, for community engagement and the benefits will therefore continue to be felt in the long term.

4.4 Develop organisational knowledge and skills within Rochester Cathedral

Staff and volunteer groups have all been very aware of organisational change, its rationale and impact on services. The willingness and ability of the volunteers in particular to reflect and discuss the functions of teams, communications between them, development of new activities and their benefits, in a positive, meaningful and constructive manner, is a demonstration of the good work that has been going on in this project.

ENDS

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