



Support After Rape
& Sexual Violence Leads

Business Plan

2026 - 2031

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About SARSVL

Support After Rape and Sexual Violence Leeds (SARSVL) provides independent specialist support services for women, girls and nonbinary people who feel our women-centred approach is right for them. We work with survivors from across the Leeds area who have experienced child sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, rape or any form of sexual violence or abuse at any time in their lives.

Established in 2009, SARSVL is an intersectional feminist organisation*, offering a diverse range of trauma-specialist counselling and therapy, advocacy, outreach and emotional support services.

We offer women-centred services and spaces because many survivors feel safest and best able to heal from the trauma of sexual violence and abuse in this kind of environment, and because it's rarely available elsewhere. We are a trans-inclusive women's organisation, which means we are run by and for women and girls (including cis and trans women and girls), and nonbinary people who feel our women-centred approach is right for them.

SARSVL is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee. Responsibility for the day-to-day running of our organisation is delegated to our CEO and the rest of our senior staff team, whose work is overseen by our board of trustees.

We know feminism can mean different things to different people. This is how our understanding of intersectional feminism shapes our work:

We recognise the system of white supremacist heteropatriarchy in which we live creates and maintains power imbalances in our society, and harms everyone.

We aim to resist and dismantle this system and to challenge the structures that discriminate against women, girls and others with marginalised gender identities.

We recognise sexual violence and abuse, and all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG), as both causes and consequences of gender inequality worldwide.

We are committed to social justice, equity, inclusion, anti-racism and anti-oppression of all kinds.

The journey so far...

First two co-founders came together during the 16 Days of Action to End VAWG

2008

First public meeting (January), followed by regular Steering Group meetings with a diverse group of Leeds women wanting to establish a Leeds Rape Crisis Centre

2009

SARSVL is registered with Companies House & Charity Commission. Telephone helpline launched, run totally by volunteers

2010

First members of paid staff recruited, first premises secured in Leeds city centre, first major grant funding, helpline opening hours extended & varied, text, email & Freephone helpline established

2012

Independent Sexual Violence Advocacy (ISVA) service established

2014

Counselling service set up

2016

Young People's ISVA service is set up, allowing us to support survivors aged 13+. First CEO recruited

2021

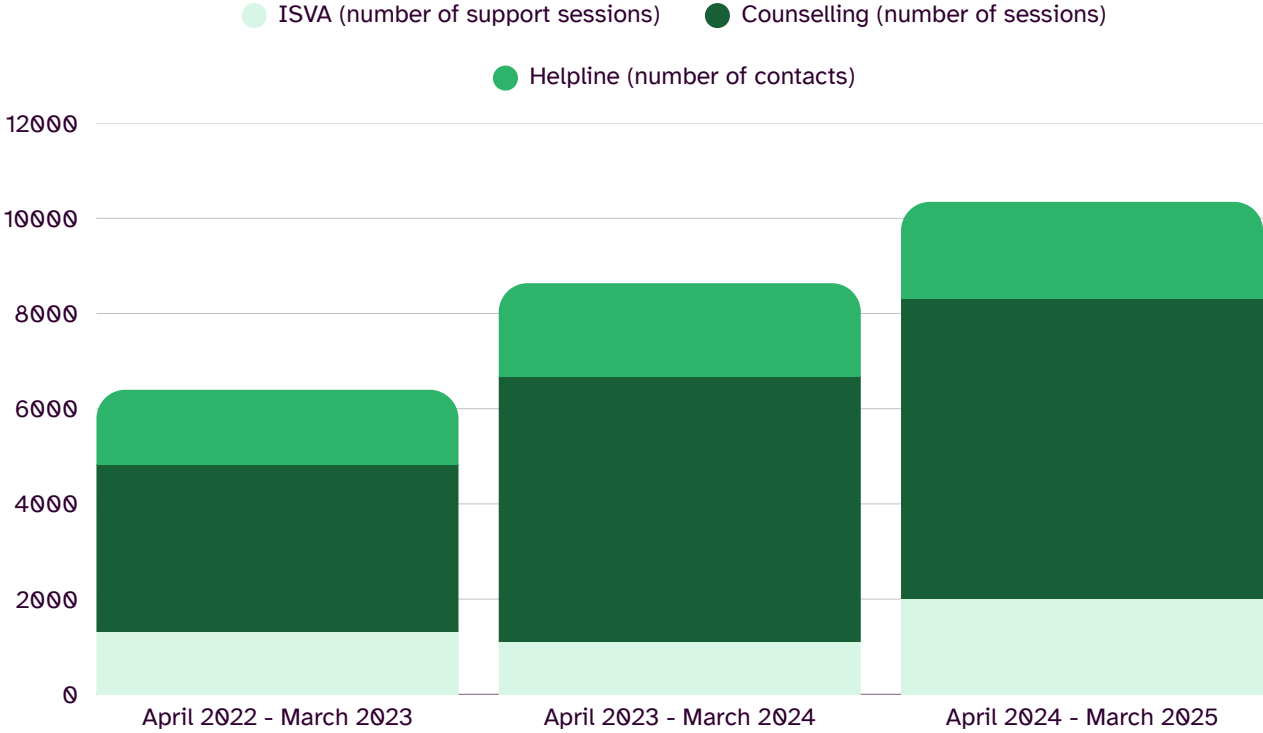
Move to new premises in Leeds city centre, which better meets the needs of service users, staff and volunteers

2023

New Outreach & Pathfinder services established

2025

The journey so far...



Alongside the increase in the types and volume of services SARSVL offers, the number of people using SARSVL's services has more than doubled in the last 3 years.

98% of referrals are self-referrals, which highlights survivors actively choosing SARSVL.



Our services

Our services are specialist and confidential. We often work in partnership with others to support survivors but we are independent, for example of the police or social services. We provide services in women-centred spaces, including in person and online. All our services are free, and we offer interpreters and other support with access when needed.

Counselling

Our Counselling service provides therapeutic support to women and nonbinary people who feel our women-centred approach is right for them aged 18 and over. We offer a range of services, including short- and longer-term individual counselling, pre-trial therapy, psycho-education groups and peer support groups.

Helpline

Our Helpline provides specialist non-judgmental emotional support to women, girls and nonbinary people who feel our women-centred approach is right for them aged 13 and over. This service is anonymous and confidential. We offer support over Freephone, text and email, and are open over a variety of times and days through the week.

ISVA

Our Independent Sexual Violence Advocates (ISVAs) provide support to women, girls and nonbinary people who feel our women-centred approach is right for them aged 13 and over. ISVAs support survivors around the criminal justice system. This can include deciding whether or not to report to the police, navigating the criminal justice system, and support through the court process.

Outreach

We increasingly provide services on an 'outreach' basis, meeting survivors where they are and advocating for them with other services. Our Pathfinder Key Worker particularly supports survivors to access health and other services. Our Outreach team currently works to improve the accessibility and relevance of our services for sex working and homeless survivors.

Quality assurance and governance

We are proud to hold a variety of memberships and affiliations, including:

- Members of Women & Girls Alliance Leeds
- Members of West Yorkshire Rape Crisis Partnership
- Accredited members of Rape Crisis England & Wales (RCEW), meeting the Rape Crisis National Service Standards (RCNSS)
- Members of the Helplines Partnership
- British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy (BACP) membership
- Mindful Employer Plus
- VAWG Sector Anti-Racism Charter signatories



We also sit on a range of local panels and boards to ensure the voices of sexual violence and abuse survivors are represented. These include:

- West Yorkshire Domestic & Sexual Abuse Board
- Leeds Violence Against Women & Girls Board
- Leeds Domestic Abuse Voice & Accountability Forum (DAVA)
- Visible Strategic Steering Group (Leeds)
- West Yorkshire Survivor Leaders Partnership Board
- Leeds Criminal Justice Board Victim and Witness Group
- Leeds Crown Court Improvement Group
- RCEW Criminal Justice Reference Group
- West Yorkshire Police Violence Against Women & Girls Scrutiny Panel
- Yorkshire & Humber Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) Rape Scrutiny Panel
- Mental Health Information and Strategy Network (Leeds)



Service user engagement

Survivors at the centre of our work

81% of our staff, trustees and volunteers have lived experience of sexual violence and over a third (3 out of 8) of our current trustees, plus several of our frontline service delivery volunteers, are former users of our own services.

We proactively and continuously seek and act on survivors' feedback, for example through end-of-service questionnaires, online consultations, a prominent suggestions box, and one-to-one and group sessions.

We are active members of the Survivor Leaders project with our West Yorkshire Rape Crisis partners, and have a locality group in our area. Survivor Leaders aims to give voice to survivors and equip them to advocate for the changes they want for all sexual violence survivors.

Survivors have also been actively engaged in the creation of this strategy and through this work they told us:

I think it's positive that [the new vision statement] is visibly more inclusive for marginalised gender identities also and recognises that experiencing sexual violence shouldn't be accepted by anyone.

[SARSVL is really good at] listening and adapting to the needs and wishes of service users and [their] feedback

Thank you again for allowing me to be in the [strategy] session. I cannot give SARSVL enough credit [for the] invaluable support I found through the service.

In our current climate, I just want to say how important the explicitly feminist orientation of SARSVL is and I hope that isn't something that the organisation is pressured to or feels the need to change or tone down.

the diversity of ways you can interact with SARSVL is really positive and means that (for me) you're supported in different ways for different stages of 'healing'/moving forward...trans women being able to access SARSVL's services [also] remains incredibly important to me.

The new version [of the mission statement] is very powerful and makes me feel so excited for SARSVL's future

Vision, mission, values

In 2025, we reviewed our vision, mission and values to make sure they reflect our growth and who we are as an organisation. We consulted with trustees, staff, volunteers, and survivors who use our services.

Our vision

SARSVL wants everyone to be free from the fear and experience of sexual violence and abuse.

Our mission

SARSVL is an intersectional feminist organisation that exists to support those whose lives have been affected by sexual violence and abuse.

We provide support in ways that centre, uphold and address the voice, rights and needs of women, girls and nonbinary people who feel our women-centred approach is right for them.

We challenge and disrupt narratives and systems that enable and perpetuate sexual violence and abuse, working towards their elimination.

Our values

Intersectional feminism

We're committed to providing equitable, inclusive services, rooted in anti-racist, anti-oppressive practice. We strive for social justice for all survivors.

With and for survivors

We recognise survivors as unique individuals and respond to their needs with diverse services and by working in partnership with aligned organisations. We know survivors are the experts in their own lives. We listen, believe and support them with empathy.

Centring women and girls

We create and maintain safe, healing spaces for and with women, girls and nonbinary people who feel our women-centred approach is right for them.

Context

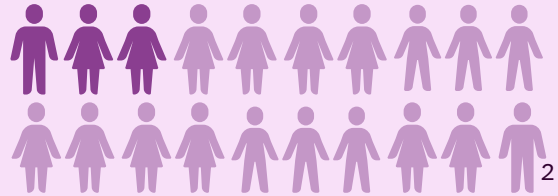
The national picture



1 in 4 women (25.7%) experiences some form of rape or sexual abuse in her lifetime (from age 16).

1

15% of girls experience sexual abuse before their 16th birthday.



2

The vast majority of perpetrators of sexual violence are male (92%).



2



6 out of 7 rapes and sexual offences are carried out by someone known to the survivor.

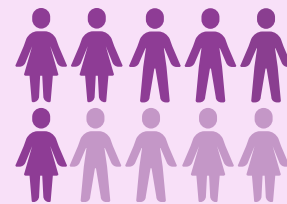
1

71,227 rapes were recorded by police in 2024, but 5 out of 6 survivors do not report their experience.



1

Black and mixed heritage adults are 60% more likely than white adults to experience sexual assault.



6

47% of trans or nonbinary people experience some form of sexual violence in their lifetime.



4

2x

Disabled women are almost twice as likely to have experienced sexual assault in the last year than non-disabled women.

5

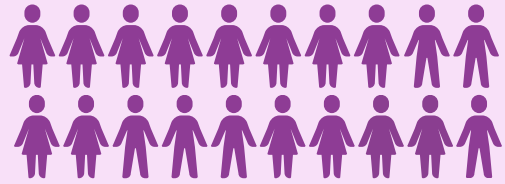
1. Office of National Statistics (2025)
2. Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse (2025)
3. Home Office (2025)

4. National Institute for Health Research (2024)
5. Office of National Statistics (2019)
6. End Violence Against Women (EVAW) (2022)

Context

The local picture

97% of those asked by Women Friendly Leeds felt being a woman impacted their safety.



1

1.55

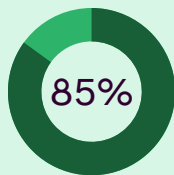
The rate of violence, including sexual violence, is 1.55 times higher in Leeds compared to the UK as a whole.

2

27% of Leeds respondents had been flashed at (indecent exposure) compared to 14% of women in a national sample.

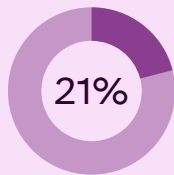


1



85% of those responding to the Women Friendly Leeds survey had experienced being leered at, cat-called or wolf-whistled.

1



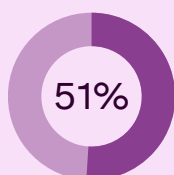
21% of Leeds people are Black or racially minoritised (identify with ethnicities other than 'White').

3

0.72% of people in Leeds have a gender identity different from the sex they were registered at birth (highest in West Yorkshire, and 31% higher than England's average).



3



51% of women currently sex working have experienced child sexual abuse.

4

1. Leeds Women's Safety Survey (2021)

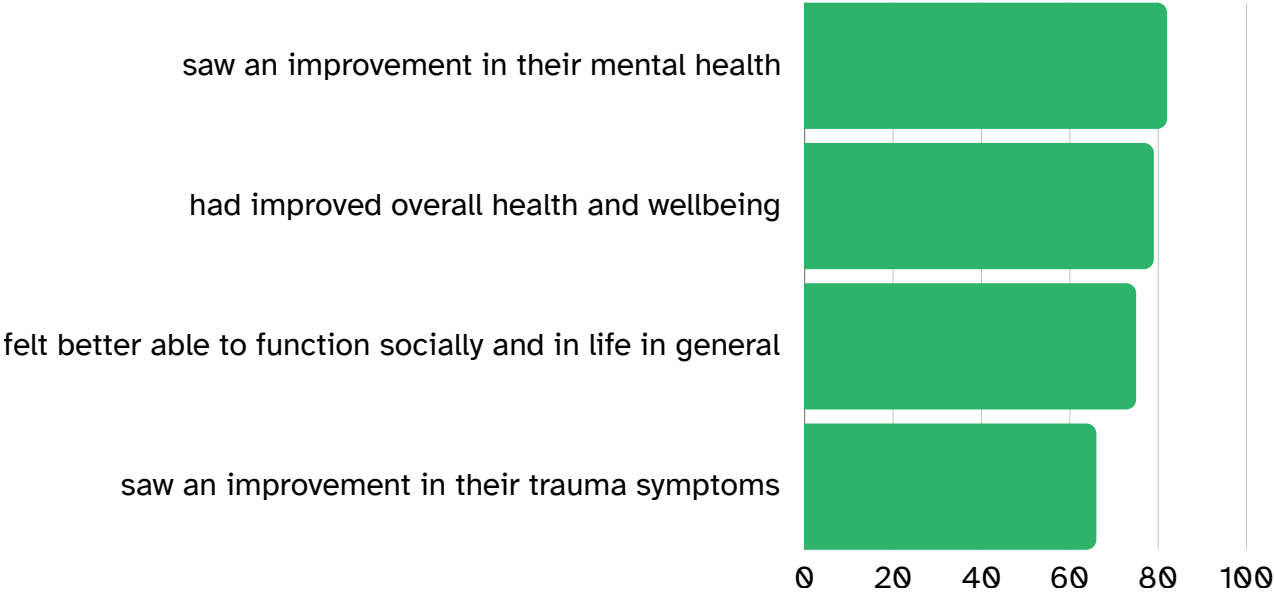
2. Crime Rate (2026)

3. Census (2021)

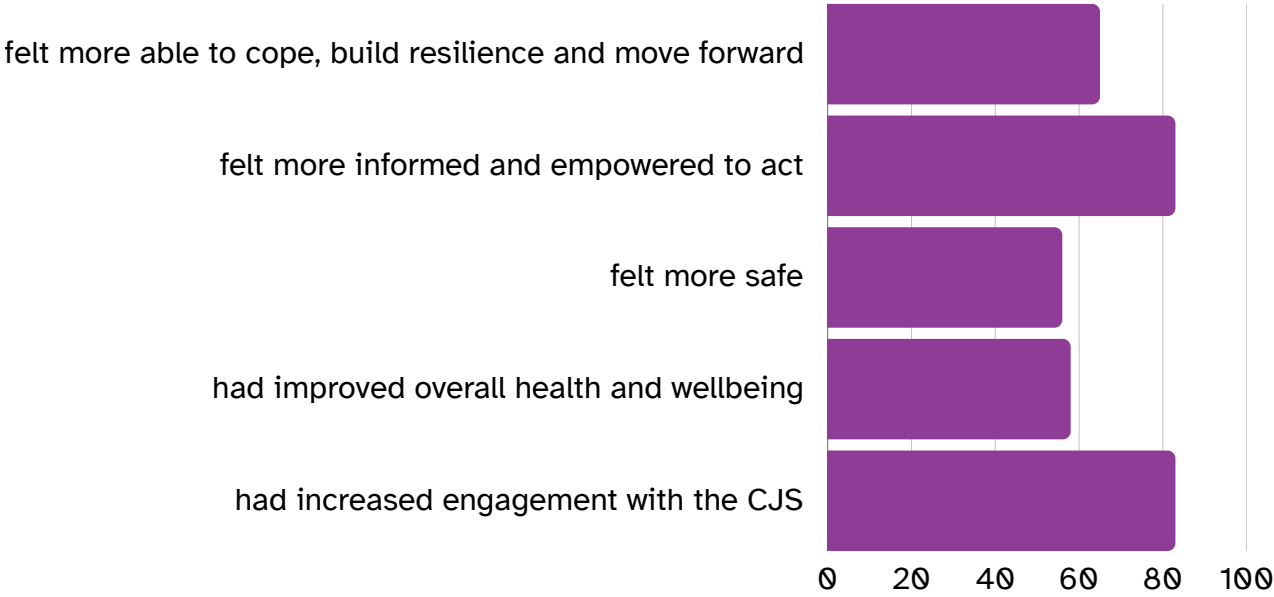
4. Needs Assessment of Vulnerable Women - Bevan Leeds, Basis, Joanna Project, HHIT (2023)

Service user outcomes

During March 2024 - April 2025 the following % of people who used our counselling service:



During March 2024 - April 2025 the following % of people who used our ISVA service:



Service user outcomes

Thankyou so much for giving me a safe environment to talk about what happened to me and process things at my own pace without pressure or judgement, this is the first place I have felt listened to, respected and believed and I am so grateful.

Thankyou for helping me to understand that it wasn't my fault and that I am strong enough to survive and achieve the things I want to.

[The calls] made me feel that I matter and that it's validated that it's a real thing that I have been through and I deserve the support.

The fact that you (SARSVL) take it so seriously reassures you.

Before I was just very numb about it and couldn't talk to anyone about it. I just sobbed on my own. From first contact [with SARSVL] I was told that I was believed and it was a sigh of relief. Don't know what I would have done if a friend hadn't put me in touch with you..I feel that it has made me feel stronger. I was so worried by myself.

I wouldn't have been able to do this on my own... having an ISVA there to validate my experience was so helpful in a system that isn't built to validate survivors' experiences.

I have learnt so much about myself and how to cope, I have stopped hating myself and that's the most amazing feeling. I finally feel positive about life and living it and have so many ways to now cope with any down days or struggles. I valued not being judged and feeling able to say anything. Honestly, I can't thank you enough. I don't think I would still be here without the care, support, and advice given.

It feels safe because I felt valued, believed and understood - my feelings were validated and helped me to not feel bad about feeling the way I have. The support is specialist, it's designed for women and made me feel safe. The staff were so helpful and responsive, even when my communication wasn't great, they never gave up on me and supported me.

Our priorities

Our objectives are divided into three key areas: provision, awareness, and sustainability.

Within each area of work we have set a series of enabling priorities, short-term priorities, and longer-term priorities.

Enabling priorities are those that need to be in place to support the organisation in reaching the other milestones and reflect work that is either ongoing or requires more rapid action.

Short-term priorities are ones we hope to realise within a three-year period. Longer-term priorities are those we aim to realise within five years.

Provision

Ensure our specialist services are fully accessible, responsive and appropriate for women, girls and nonbinary people in the Leeds District, and are designed and run in partnership with those who use our services.

	Enabling activities	Short-term activities	Longer-term activities
Expand service provision to meet the needs of all survivors who want to use our services	Increase staff capacity on the helpline service to ensure service sustainability	Expand the provision of existing services to increase support offered (including out-of-hours support) Increase support for those waiting to access services	Expand services to meet the needs of younger survivors Increase provision of outreach work to 'easy to ignore' / marginalised communities
Ensure our services are run in line with best practice guidelines	Continue to strengthen the safeguarding processes of the organisation	Ensure SARSVL continues to work in line with relevant best practice kitemarks	Increase organisational knowledge of emerging issues, such as online abuse

Our priorities

Provision

Continued

	Enabling activities	Short-term activities	Longer-term activities
Continue to embed our anti-racist, trans-inclusive, intersectional feminism within the organisation	<p>Continue to embed intersectional feminism as a core value</p> <p>Continue to ensure trans-inclusive provision</p>	Continue developing and implementing our anti-racism action plan and ensure culturally informed service provision	<p>Increase support to other 'easy to ignore' / marginalised groups</p> <p>Increase the diversity of the staff and volunteer team so it better reflects the population of Leeds</p>
Further embed lived experience in our work	Continue engagement with the West Yorkshire Survivor Leaders project	Build an action plan for further lived experience engagement	Improve our monitoring, evaluation, outcomes, impact and learning frameworks

Awareness

Ensure sexual violence and abuse and our work to combat them are understood in communities and by other agencies across Leeds and beyond.

	Enabling activities	Short-term activities	Longer-term activities
Increase and develop our external profile	Continue meaningful engagement with local forums and networks	Increase outreach work, including in schools and colleges	Further strengthen and develop our social media presence
Ensure SARSVL is known as the local 'go to' organisation for all issues relating to sexual violence and abuse	Ensure continued engagement in research and knowledge work in relation to VAWG	Create a training, research and knowledge strategy	Increase our delivery of training and knowledge provision

Sustainability

Ensure the organisation is well-run and sustainable through robust governance and leadership, and diverse funding streams which enable both continuity and innovation.

	Enabling activities	Short-term activities	Longer-term activities
Ensure strong team morale for all staff and volunteers who work with SARSVL	Continue our embedded culture of collective care and inclusion	<p>Improve our internal communications</p> <p>Improve staff training pathways, modelled on the volunteer training</p>	Increase organisational career opportunities and pathways
Ensure a culture of robust and supportive governance	Continue with a well functioning Board of Trustees	Review governing documents to enable a wider geographical reach and ensure trans inclusion is explicit	<p>Undertake succession planning processes for the senior team and Board of Trustees</p> <p>Explore staff unionisation</p>
Sustain and increase our capacity to deliver our services	Continue reviewing and improving internal systems to ensure they are fit for purpose and future-proof	<p>Ensure a robust fundraising strategy underpins our sustainability and growth</p> <p>Deliver our social enterprise model</p>	Have the right venue(s) from which to undertake our work

Glossary of terms

Cisgender	Someone whose current gender is the same as the sex assigned to them at birth.
Feminism	Belief in and commitment to full social, economic, and political equality for women.
Gender inequality	The understanding that people's experience of and treatment by the world are different based on their gender.
Intersectional	A term created by Kimberlé Crenshaw to explain how different parts of someone's identity interact to influence their experience of and treatment by the world (for example, race, gender, class).
Marginalised	People being treated as if they are not important. Often used to talk about groups of people who are less included than others, for example, people of colour, disabled people, older people etc.
Nonbinary	Someone who doesn't describe their gender within the traditional gender binary of man/woman.
Sexual violence	An umbrella term to describe all forms of sexual abuse, rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation (FGM) etc.
Social justice	Promoting a better society by challenging injustice and inequity and valuing diversity and inclusion.
Transgender	Someone whose current gender is different to the sex assigned to them at birth.
Violence against women and girls	An umbrella term to describe all forms of violence perpetrated disproportionately against women and girls, including sexual violence.

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Get support



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