

# THE HARRY CROSSLEY CHILDREN'S NURSING DEVELOPMENT UNIT

Building Children's Nursing in Africa, for Africa



THE HARRY CROSSLEY  
Children's Nursing  
Development Unit



ANNUAL REPORT **2024**





The Harry Crossley Children’s Nursing Development Unit is a nurse-led teaching and scholarship unit in the Department of Paediatrics and Child Health at the University of Cape Town. We continue to build capacity in children’s nursing in Africa, supporting nurses, educators, and leaders as they strive for the best outcomes for children through contextually appropriate, evidence-based practice, and with a commitment to unapologetic African nursing excellence.

We sustain and build a programme of work focused on three pillars of activity:



Teaching and Training for Nurses

Objective: To advance the knowledge, skills and confidence of nurses working with children to provide contextually appropriate evidence-based care.



Supporting Educators and Institutions

Objective: To support children’s nursing educators and institutions to build sustainable, contextually appropriate and high-quality educational training programmes.



Working with Children’s Nursing Leaders and Teams

Objective: To work with children’s nursing leaders and teams to articulate and establish best practice in local and regional clinical facilities and services.

Thanks to ongoing responsive and innovative efforts of The Harry Crossley Children’s Nursing Development Unit team, 2024 brought remarkable growth and impact in the goal of building children nursing in Africa for Africa.



In 2024, the Harry Crossley Children’s Nursing Development Unit (CNDU) experienced significant growth across its three core areas. This included expanding its educational offerings, extending its geographical reach, and improving operational systems through a deepened collaboration with a Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning specialist. Together, this ensured the Unit’s work remained impactful and responsive to the evolving needs of child healthcare.

A cornerstone of the Unit’s expanded reach is the ‘Essentials of Nursing Children’ online courses. In 2024, 115 nurses from 58 institutions across 10 African countries completed these courses, bringing the total number of nurses trained online to 270. These courses are intentionally designed to facilitate the learning and application of knowledge to practice, all while remaining active within their clinical services.

A key event in 2024 was the launch of the course, ‘Essentials of Nursing Children with a Cancer / Blood Disorder’, which addresses a critical gap in paediatric oncology nurse training.

Six senior children’s nurses will graduate after successful study in 2024 - 5 with a master’s and one with a PhD.

The rigorous evaluation of the first Master’s Degree has yielded rich insights into facilitating practice change in local clinical settings that will prove to be an important blueprint for Best Practice projects to follow.

These initiatives reflect the Unit’s commitment to providing accessible, comprehensive, and specialised training, ensuring more nurses across Africa are equipped to deliver the highest standards of care for children.

PILLAR 1: TEACHING & TRAINING FOR CHILDREN’S NURSES



‘The Essentials of Nursing Children’ online short course suite

In its third year, the ‘Essentials of Nursing Children’ online course suite continues to grow, attracting new institutions and repeat participants. Informal feedback from participants remains overwhelmingly positive, with many reporting immediate application of new knowledge to practice and advocating that colleagues also complete the course. With support from a MEL specialist, The Harry Crossley Children’s Nursing Development Unit has also streamlined recruitment, enrolment, and tracking through automated systems, improving efficiency and access.

A new course, *Essentials of Nursing Children with Cancer or Blood Disorders*, was launched in 2024, addressing a critical gap in local paediatric oncology training. Prognosis for children with cancer in low and middle income countries is critically lower than that in upper income countries. This could be partially addressed by having more trained healthcare workers, but training opportunities are extremely limited and not focused on paediatric specialties. This course is open to all nurses working in the field, including oncology nursing interns hosted by the Unit.

In 2024, the design and development of the *Essentials of Paediatric Burns Care* course were directed by an in-depth local situation and needs analysis, supported by clinician experts from the Chelsea Westminster NHS Trust. As part of a wider training programme, this course will be offered to local nurses in the Cape Winelands East region in 2025 and 2026, before becoming available Africa-wide in 2027.

The reach of these online courses is significant, often providing the first formal paediatric training for nurses. Ongoing innovative marketing is planned for 2025 to ensure that nurses working in a variety of clinical settings all have the opportunity to access the course.

Quotes from 2024 Online Course participants:

“The two most valuable insights I gained were the Regul8 framework and the understanding that children are fundamentally different from adults and must be cared for accordingly.”

“I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to participate in the online course. The knowledge and skills I have gained will greatly enhance my professional growth—thank you for your unwavering support.”

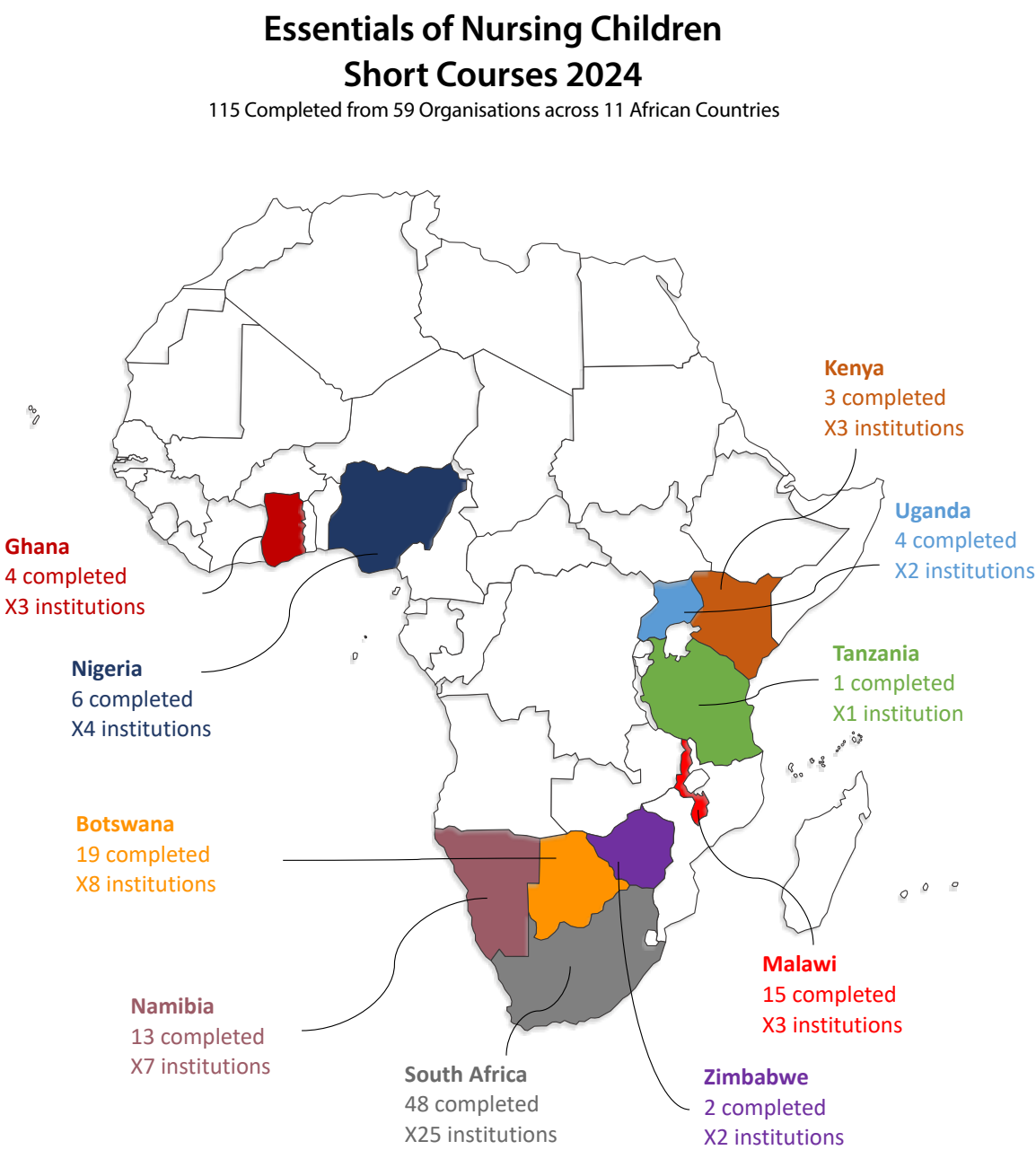
“My knowledge in the critical care unit has transformed—I am no longer the nurse I used to be.”

“Before, I did things because I had to. Now, I understand why we do them.”

Master’s of Nursing in Child Nursing and PhD Programmes

Five senior nurses graduated from the Clinical Master’s programme, returning to Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, as Advanced Practice Nurses. These specialist nurse practitioners play a vital role in improving patient care and strengthening healthcare systems. In paediatrics, particularly, they bridge gaps in specialist care by managing complex cases, leading patient care, and mentoring nursing teams.

One PhD candidate has submitted and is scheduled to graduate in September 2025. Another is nearing completion, and a third is in process. All are contributing valuable research to the field of paediatric nursing.





PILLAR 2: SUPPORTING EDUCATORS & INSTITUTIONS



The Children’s Nursing Educators Forum

The Harry Crossley Children’s Nursing Development Unit is currently a sectoral lead in children’s nursing education throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. Central to the work is the Children’s Nursing Educators Forum (CNEF), a regional network that connects and supports educators. This Forum fosters collaboration, shares best practices, and builds capacity, ensuring high-quality, context-specific training for nurses caring for children across the region.

Membership of this Forum now consists of 21 educator teams from across 14 African countries. Meetings in 2024 focused on leadership, bridging the gap between nurses and tutors, how we perceive our data, and academic reading.

Workforce Observatory Survey Report

In January 2025, the International Council of Nurses again highlighted the global nursing shortage at the World Economic Forum. With the ongoing emigration of specialist nurses from Africa, tracking paediatric nurse training is more crucial than ever, and the Children’s Nursing Development Unit remains committed to this effort through the annual Children’s Nursing Workforce Observatory.

This Observatory aims to present a comprehensive picture of the children’s nursing workforce in Sub-Saharan Africa and share this information with national stakeholders to guide workforce strategies and training plans. Each year, the Unit leads data collection efforts to produce three key resources:

- 1. An annual **Children’s Nursing Training Activity Summary Report** which summarises key insights from the past year’s data collection.
- 2. A **country-level dashboard** which provides data about the programmes available in each country, filterable by institution and year, alongside available child health indicators.
- 3. The **African Children’s Nursing Education Forum Directory** which presents data about available programmes in an accessible format for funders, employers and potential students.

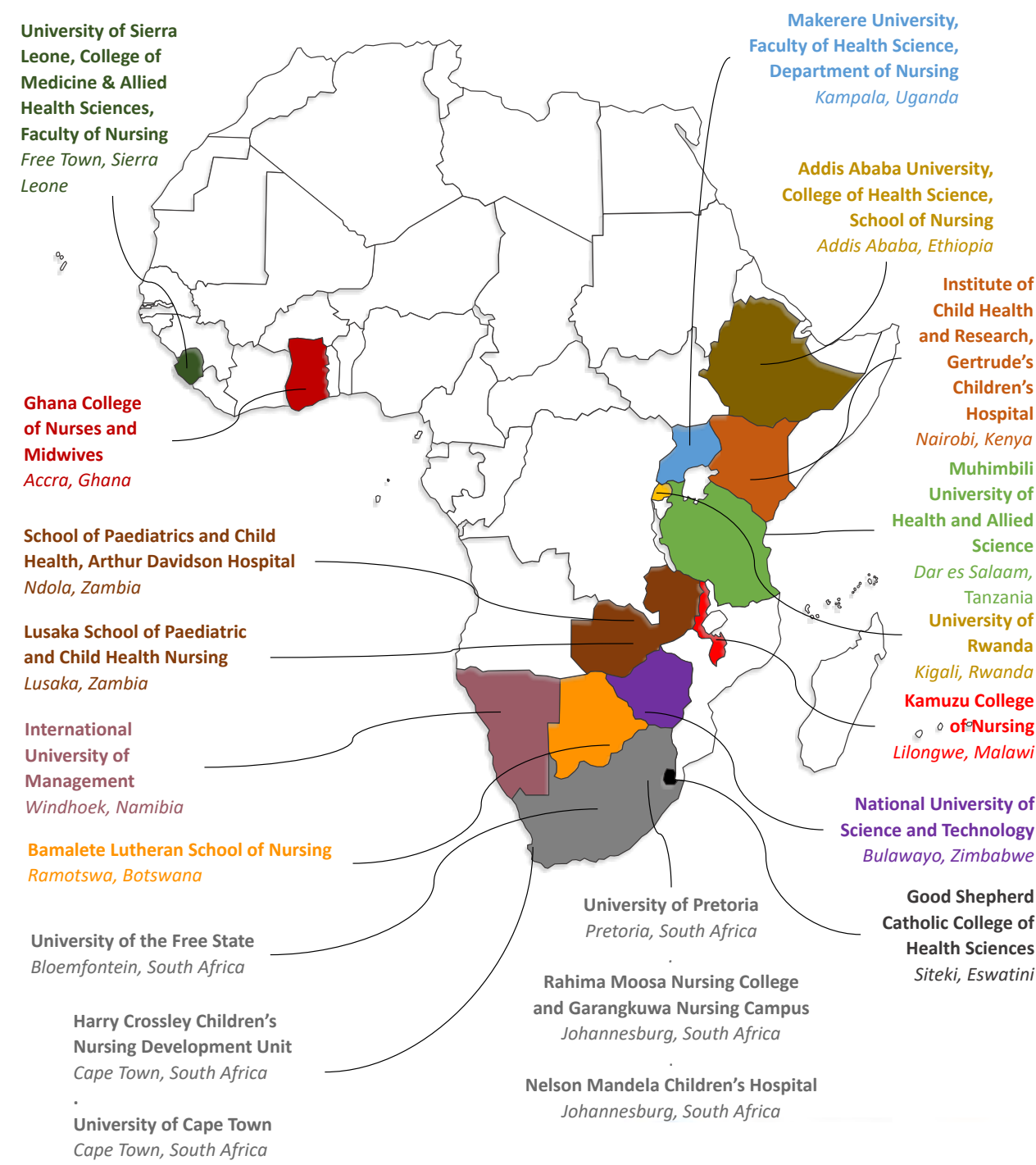
Advanced Nursing Practice Symposium

In April, The Harry Crossley Children’s Nursing Development Unit co-hosted a symposium exploring clinical nursing scholarship, the increasingly important work of integrating of practice, education, and research in Africa. The symposium was attended by nurse leaders and educators designing and offering curricula for clinical master’s and doctorate programmes in nursing from Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, and South Africa.

A recent publication is highlight as timely as Advanced Practice Nurse roles are being discussed and introduced in health systems across the African region. North, N.,Brysiewicz, P., &Coetzee,M.(2024). ‘We are pulled to the four corners’: Qualitative role descriptions of advanced practice children’s nurses in Malawi. Journal for Specialists in Pediatric Nursing, 29, e12433. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jspn.12433>

Children’s Nursing Educators Forum Members

21 participating educator 59 teams across 14 African Countries



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2024:

PILLAR 3: DEVELOPING CHILDREN’S NURSING LEADERS & SERVICES



Strengthening Burns Care Training

The Children’s Hospital Trust ‘Strengthening Paediatric Burns Care’ project is focused on improving the care of children who have been burnt in the Cape Winelands, South Africa. As the Project Lead for the third ‘training’ objective, the Unit, in collaboration with colleagues from Chelsea & Westminster NHS Trust in the UK, visited the Cape Winelands East region and conducted a practice and learning needs assessment. This included visits to various levels of healthcare facilities, chatting to health providers, and hosting a participative workshop to establish the patient profile and common current healthcare journey.

Insights from the visit led to the design of a seven element training programme; four elements of which were commenced in 2024 - registration of three nurses to the Essentials of Nursing Sick Children course; registration of two nurses to a UK Advanced Burns Care course; one pair of nurse interns visiting burns services at Red Cross War Memorial Children’s Hospital for two weeks; and the design of the Essentials of Paediatric Burns Care online course.

Clinical Internships

In 2024, the Children’s Nursing Development Unit welcomed two more pairs of Oncology Nurse Interns from Ghana and Malawi, funded by World Child Cancer. This brings the total to 22 interns from six countries since 2019. These six-week internships are coordinated alongside the training of paediatric oncologists from their home institutions, fostering multidisciplinary teamwork and strengthening collaboration in childhood cancer care in Africa.

The clinical internship was also extended this year, as part of the Children’s Hospital Trust Strengthening Burns Care Project. Two Emergency Ward Sisters from Worcester Hospital were welcomed into burns services, spending time in the ward, in outpatients, in theatre and with the wider allied health team. Key relationships were forged and valuable insights were gained into the possibilities of paediatric wound care in our setting.

Quotes from 2024 Clinical Internship participants:

"This internship has been very educational. I have learned so much on the need to consistently improve on my standard of practice, different ways to care for children with cancers and also advocate for the children and their families."

"This program has really opened my eyes. There were many things we were just learning in theory, but now we have seen them practically. It has given me insight on how cancer can be cured if early diagnosed and early chemo treatment is initiated early."

Journal Clubs

In 2024, we relaunched our Journal Club to be fully accessible to anyone through our YouTube channel. Announced via social media, the monthly journal club consisted of a graphic summary of the article, a narrated PowerPoint presentation and a set of questions to prompt learning and reflection. We anticipate that nurses can watch independently or gather a group of colleagues to unpack, understand, and discuss the article together.

Evidence-Based Practice Guidelines

A further three Evidence-Based Practice Guidelines were produced by master’s students as part of their Independent Research Study course. They have been uploaded as open-access resources on ZivaHub and span a range of paediatric focuses:

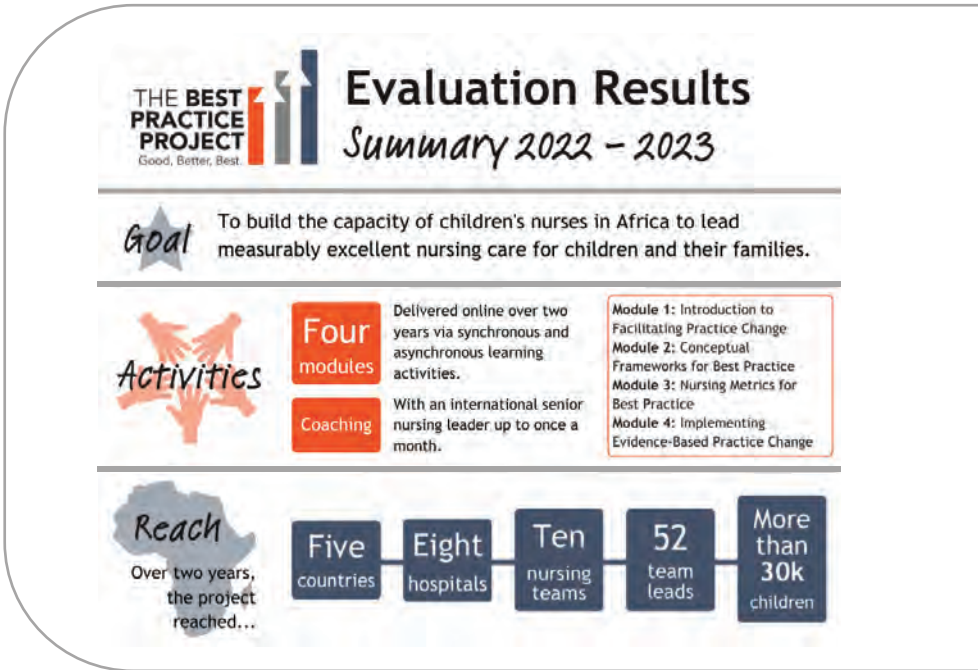
- The nurse's role in the assessment and management of acute chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting in paediatric patients: An Evidence-Based Practice Guideline.
- The nurse's role in assessing and managing hydration of paediatric burn patients on their initial presentation at a primary healthcare setting: An Evidence-Based Practice Guideline.
- The nurse's role in paediatric pain management during peripheral intravenous cannulation in non-emergency situations: An Evidence-Based Practice Guideline.

Best Practice Project Evaluation.

The evaluation of the 2022-2023 Best Practice Project, funded by the Burdett Nursing Foundation, was completed in 2024. We are delighted that the project not only met but exceeded its objectives, leaving a lasting impact on the ten nursing teams from five countries AND the more than 15 000 children and families they serve each year.

Prof Minette Coetzee presented key learnings from the project at the East Central Southern Africa College of Nursing and Midwifery (ECSACONM) Conference in Lesotho in September 2024. She also conducted a follow-up focus group with Best Practice Project leads at this conference to evaluate the project's impact almost a year later.

"We had the data in figures, but now having it in graphs we are able to see the variations that are there and the improvements that are happening. So, it is a very helpful tool for us as nurses to be able to analyse and also to be able to understand what is happening on the ground in an easier way, rather than dealing with the actual data itself." - (Clinical nurse project participant)





A HUGE THANK YOU & APPRECIATION TO ALL OUR DONORS



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Children's Nursing  
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FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Harry Crossley Children's  
Nursing Development Unit,  
Department of Paediatrics and Child Health,  
University of Cape Town,  
Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital,  
Rondebosch,  
Cape Town 7700, South Africa

Tel: +27 21 658 5492  
[www.childrensnursingunit.uct.ac.za](http://www.childrensnursingunit.uct.ac.za)  
Assoc Prof Minette Coetzee,  
Director,  
[minette.coetzee@uct.ac.za](mailto:minette.coetzee@uct.ac.za)  
Jane Vos,  
Programme Manager,  
[jane.vos@uct.ac.za](mailto:jane.vos@uct.ac.za)

