

# THE COMMUNICATOR

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## Grant County Employee Newsletter

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Editor:  
Dawn Mergen,  
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## Welcome the Interim Director of Unified Community Services

Hello! My name is Holly Knapp writing to say "hello" to you all in this official newsletter- If you didn't already know- I was appointed Interim Director of Unified Community Services in December 2022. My husband Andrew and I live locally and we love raising our children, spending time outdoors, caring for animals and working on a variety of projects we have no business doing. I do come to serve in this role with 16 years of experience in the mental health field in a variety of settings - Sober Living, Residential Treatment, Group Homes, Inpatient Hospitals, Crisis, Higher Education and Outpatient Clinics- in a variety of states - Ohio, Nebraska, Iowa and Wisconsin. I have 8 years of supervisory experience and 8 years of experience working at Unified Community Services. I have an Associate's degree in Business Administration, a Bachelor's degree in Psychology, a Master's degree in Community Counseling and hold licensure as a Professional Counselor in the state of Wisconsin. I am honored to be in this role and looking forward

to ensuring that Unified is doing its best to provide much needed services to our communities into the future. I want to thank those who have reached out with warm welcomes and encouragement already- you are so kind. I look forward to meeting everyone and working with you all in our beautiful county!

### *Unified Community Services of Grant and Iowa County ~ Mission Statement...*

*Contributing to the development of healthier individuals, families and communities within Grant and Iowa Counties by providing mental health, substance abuse and developmental disabilities services.*

# Dana's Desktop

Dana C. Andrews, Grant County IT Technician



## The Computers Are Coming for Us All

The premise of several Sci-Fi books and movies has been that all the computers world-wide connect together and then take over (SkyNet from Terminator for example). Great entertainment but now they are starting to look like harbingers of a not-to-distance dystopian future.

This week, an open letter was posted recommending a six-month pause in artificial intelligence (AI) development. This letter was signed by over one thousand tech leaders including Bill Gates (Microsoft), Steve Wozniak (Apple) and Elon Musk (Tesla, SpaceX, Twitter). Their collective feeling is AI is getting good enough to actually fool people. As we know, early AI models that were exposed to the internet had 'episodes' where they would become racist, misogynistic, or advocating forms of self-harm.

The ability of these programs to mislead, according to the letter, needs to be addressed in such a way as to identify and control, if not outright prevent, such behavior before we go any further. From the letter, "... *there is a "level of planning and management" that is "not happening," and that instead, in recent months, unnamed "AI labs" have been "locked in an out-of-control race to develop and deploy ever more powerful digital minds that no one – not even their creators – can understand, predict, or reliably control.*" If more information develops about this "I'll be back".



## Fragmenting AI

While there is concern in fully developed Artificial Intelligence (AI), there are also several programs that are experimenting with using AI for a single field of endeavor. Take for instance, QNLP, Quantum Natural Language Processing. This is a program being developed by the British Broadcasting company (BBC). Its goal is to extract any significant information from all of humanity's current digital babble. Starting with their 15 million item archive (over 100 years of news and information), they hope (along with quantum computers) to be able to analyze language for meaning, rather than content or instructions.

Another example is in language translation. As anyone bilingual (trilingual, multilingual) knows, current technology will translate words and phrases but are not able to output the results in proper grammar structure for the language. They are also not able to properly insert idioms when appropriate. However, AIs, with their ability to learn, are now starting to overcome these obstacles.

Using a metric called TTE (Time to Edit or how long it takes for a human to correct a machine translation), software developers have lowered the time from 3.5 seconds per word to just under 2 seconds. They estimate at this pace of improvement, by the end of the decade, machine translations will be flawless. (But will they be able to tell you how to update your phone apps?)

While researching this, a connection between these two initiatives was discovered. Both of these projects are using something called 'category theory'. In the case of language, rather than trying to translate "your mother wears combat boots" into something just as passionate in another language, category theory ignores the words but understands that this is a category about insulting

someone. The AI can then choose the appropriate response for the other language (“your mother eats sunflower seeds”). Full disclosure; My mother, to the best of my knowledge, has never eaten sunflower seeds or worn combat boots.

### I Did Not Forget About CES

The consumer electronics show (CES) did happen this year in ‘Vegas and was much more geared to in-person attendance (post-covid recovery mode). Here is a short listing of the more interesting items displayed.

Samsung has a surround for certain models of TV that look like the frames you see around a work of art. Not to be out-done, LG has done the same thing with Air Conditioners. The LG Artcool Gallery has a split unit with a 27” digital photo display. There are preloaded images or you can upload the family album.

GE displayed a smart mixer. It has a built-in scale with auto-sensing technology that monitors changes in texture and viscosity. Never overwhip your meringue again!

Indoor gardens are a thing now. GE, LG, Aerogarden, and Rise all have big refrigerator looking devices that feature automated water, lighting, and climate control so you can grow your own crops indoors. A mini-fridge version, called Tiiun, is about the size of a traditional stove/oven and grows lettuce and sprouts (Tiiun means sprout in Korean).

Bird Buddy is a smart bird feeder. They have cameras and microphones so you can see and hear your little visitors. It can also notify you when you have a feathered visitor and even identify them with a database of over 1,000 bird species.



Rollkers are personal mobility devices. While they look like new-age roller skates, they feel and wear like regular shoes. You walk with your normal gait but it will cover more ground, up to 7 mph in some cases.



Nose Metal is not what you think. It is a smart pillow that adjusts so you snore less at night. Using a box that sits on your nightstand, it detects when you rumble and commands various zones on the pillow to adjust so you have a better airflow.



Also making life better is Kohler, who now has a shower head with a built-in aromatherapy pod. It diffuses its healing properties by mixing with the shower water.



And this last one is where I drop the mic. AromaPlayer is a device that connects to your computer and generates smells that match up with the video you are watching. You have to buy the scents it uses but there are over 100 of them available at this time. Note that there is a collar version as well (see image).



## We're so Excited!

Grant County is very excited to announce that the County's Departments of Finance, Information Technology, and Personnel are working on a huge project that will bring us into the "21<sup>st</sup> Century"! They will be rolling out the Tyler Munis Financial and Human Resources Software Program this year.

The program will provide many benefits to the County including an employee portal which many of you have been asking for. The employee portal will allow you direct access to benefit information and enrollment, W-2's, payroll stubs, training, and... you can even update your own personal data, i.e., address changes, marital status, etc. The end results will definitely be worth all the work that goes into getting it up and running.

*More to come soon regarding employee training....*



## Protective WRS Status for Jailers (Submitted by Sheriff Nate Dreckman)

On April 6, 2023, Sheriff Nate Dreckman had the opportunity to attend the signing of 2023 Wisconsin Act 4, giving county jailers protective status within the Wisconsin Retirement System (WRS). This bipartisan bill passed both the Assembly and Senate unanimously, which is unprecedented. Protective status for county jailers means they are given the same status in the WRS as the state prison correctional officers, law enforcement, and probation and parole officers. It recognizes that working in county jails is a dangerous occupation and comes with a high degree of stress. The protective status designation provides enhanced benefits to jailers, including providing them with duty disability.

The bill has been debated for almost a decade, but discussions go all the way back to 1995. With Governor Evers signing the bill, it should help recruit and retain jailers for the county jails in Wisconsin. We must also recognize Senator Howard Marklein and Representative Mark Born for their tireless work on this bill. They have been champions of this bill from the start, and without their dedication, it would not have gotten to the point of being signed into law.





## On My Way To A Better Me in 2023

*Taught by Kim White, Owner at Mindful Empowerment*

Does life seem chaotic? Are there times when you feel like you want to get off the merry-go-round? Are you overwhelmed with stress, anxiety, burnout, and exhaustion? Would you like tools to assist you in a reset?

What to expect: Kim is offering a series of three workshops where she will guide, facilitate, and provide you with tools to incorporate into your daily life - bringing you the ability to trade your chaos for calm, and in turn allowing you to “ripple” your awesomeness into the world.

1. Mindfulness - What is it? Why do we need it? How can I live it?
2. One Word - Can one word really change my life?
3. Own Your Soul’s Paintbrush - You are the artist for your life’s canvas. What are you painting?

This workshop, sponsored by Grant County, was offered to the Courthouse and Administration building employees first, as a “pilot” program. It’s now being rolled out to other Grant County employee campuses. The three one-hour sessions are outside of work hours and the time is unpaid.

The Personnel Office will reach out when the workshop series is offered to your campus. Dates and times will be discussed at that point.

### *Feed back from participants of the Courthouse and Administration building workshop sessions...*

*“This was a nice way to bring the group—team together at the end of the day”*

*“Love the guided meditations! Amazing.”*

*“Your [Kim’s] voice is so calming and reassuring. Easy to follow guided meditation.”*



Participants of the pilot program: Kim White (teacher), Jody Bartels, Jamie Kreul, Dawn Mergen, Ashley Sullivan, Amy Miller and Joanna Schindler.

*“I saw my co-workers in a ‘different light’ and got to know those that I don’t work with on a day-to-day basis. It was comforting to learn that many of the difficult and happy things in our lives are relatable to others—we aren’t alone in our struggles.”*



*Kim White is owner at Mindful Empowerment. (Two locations - Lancaster and Bloomington). She is a Mindfulness Coach (trained and certified through Growing Minds™), Academic Tutor, Reiki Master, and Life Mentor. Kim is a published author; The Badass Within book collaboration was launched in September of 2022 and immediately hit #1 Best Seller and #1 New Release. Kim also offers Grief Support here in Lancaster for the surrounding communities. Kim’s passion and purpose is to use her gifts, talents, and skills to serve others.*

*Kim is a retired teacher, continuing to teach from different platforms. Kim and her husband, Al have made Lancaster their home for the past 40+ years. They have 3 adult children and 4 grandchildren whom they enjoy spending time with.*

## “Purpose and Compassion at Work”

In March, John McHugh, the Director of Corporate Communications, Leadership Development, and Training for Kwik Trip, Inc., presented about purpose and compassion at work. In John’s role at Kwik Trip he has helped the company achieve recognition as a Top Workplace as listed by the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, the Minneapolis Star Tribune and the Des Moines Register.

John spoke to a room of 100+ employees and County Board Supervisors on the following topics...

- Regardless of your role, what are people, customers and business partners looking for in you?
- What is the workplace culture you have created with your team that leads to success?
- Creating a mission driven culture with compassion and trust turns satisfied customers into loyal customers
- If the work we do is tied into a purpose beyond profits, our job satisfaction increases substantially, and employee turnover is reduced.



**Thank you to all who attended!**



## Grant County Employee Appreciation Cook Out

The County Board Committees will be “Cookin’ Out” for County Employees to show their appreciation during County Government Month.

This is a perfect opportunity for committee members to meet and mingle with county staff.

**Brats, Burgers, Salad, Milk, Soda, Cookies, and all the fixin’s.**

- April 11 ~ Highway, Fair, and UW Extension
- April 19 ~ Community Services Building
- April 20 ~ Orchard Manor
- April 24 ~ Cons, San, & Zoning, and Unified
- April 25 ~ Courthouse & Administration Bldg



Specific times to be determined and announced later.

**Thank you Grant County Employees for All You Do!**



## Aflac Visit ~ June 15th

Michelle Nodorft (608-778-8057) from Aflac will be in Lancaster to meet with employees that would like to learn about the coverage types, have questions, or want to make **changes effective July 1st**. Below is the visit schedule.

- 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. at the Community Services Building (Lobby Conference Room)
- 11 a.m. Group Presentation at the County Board Room; must contact Personnel Office if plan to attend
- 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Administration building (Conference Room 266)
- 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. at Orchard Manor (Conference Room 104)

## The Administration Building had a holiday door decorating competition in December

The Register of Deeds Office won the door decorating contest. They were awarded a beautiful traveling trophy to display for the year!

Register of Deeds 1st place (naughty and nice list)  
County Clerk's Office: 2nd place (not pictured)  
Facilities Maintenance: 3rd place



Andrea Noethe, Jocelyn Goodney, and MacKenzie Weber of the Register of Deeds Office



Facilities and Maintenance Manager, Garry Pluemer

## The Lancaster High School Choir sang at the Administration Building in December



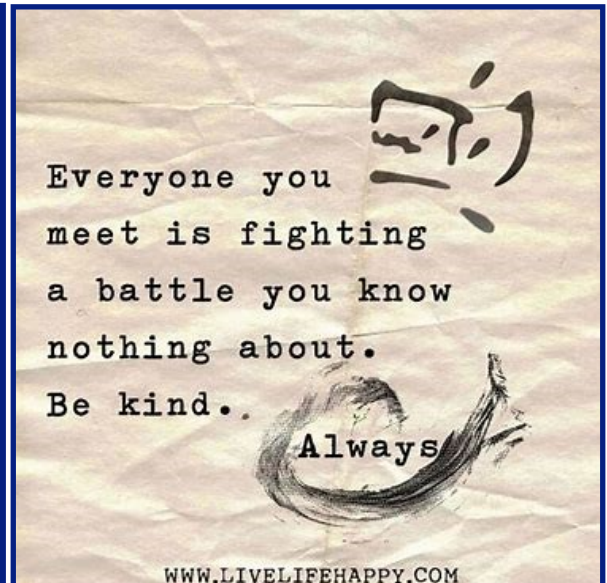
**What a wonderful holiday surprise for staff and building visitors!**

## Grant County's year 2023 observed paid holidays

- New Year's Day, Monday, January 2, 2023
- Friday Afternoon before Easter, Friday, April 7, 2023
- Memorial Day, Monday, May 29, 2023
- Independence Day, Tuesday, July 4, 2023
- Labor Day, Monday, September 4, 2023
- Veteran's Day, Friday, November 10, 2023
- Thanksgiving Day, Thursday, November 23, 2023
- Christmas Eve, Monday, December 25, 2023
- Christmas Day, Tuesday, December 26, 2023

Please note: Christmas Eve falls on a Sunday and Christmas falls on a Monday, therefore, the county will be observing Monday and Tuesday as the holidays.

The New Year's Day holiday for the year 2024 will be Monday, January 1, 2024.



Anyone wishing to have a specific subject discussed in a future newsletter may contact Joyce Roling at 723-2045 or [jroling@co.grant.wi.gov](mailto:jroling@co.grant.wi.gov).



## Employee Term Life Insurance Benefit

Grant County's benefit eligible employees are automatically enrolled in a \$10,000 term life insurance policy paid for by Grant County. This benefit also pays an additional \$10,000 for accidental death.

Effective, January 1st of this year, the County chose to change the term life insurance carrier to Kansas City Life. The new carrier's certificate of coverage will be placed on the County's HR website.

Please also note that this coverage ends when your benefit eligibility ends upon retirement/resignation. At that time a conversion of coverage notice is sent out to the departing employee should they wish to pursue coverage directly through Kansas City Life.

### Reminders...

- You may wish to have your own personal life insurance policy in place that will provide funds to cover expenses such as student loans, car payments, home mortgages, credit card debt, burial, and loss of income for your surviving loved ones. There are many options available and you can reach out to local insurance and financial agents for assistance in choosing one that is best for your needs.
- Minors that are designated as life insurance beneficiaries may not be able to access the funds until they become an adult or a legal guardian is appointed. Therefore, if the money is needed for immediate use, you may want to appoint a responsible adult as beneficiary.
- Feel free to reach out to the Personnel Department should you want to confirm who you have listed as a beneficiary for this coverage.

## Do you know?

Eligible Grant County employees have access to wellness programs and discounted gym memberships. Check them out below.

**Fitness Center Membership Discount.** All employees are eligible for a discount at four local gyms. The gyms supplied us with discounts to attract our County employees to their businesses. These fitness centers are Suppz in Fennimore and Boscobel, Elite Fitness in Lancaster, SNAP Fitness in Platteville and Anytime Fitness in Platteville. Interested employees should reach out to these fitness centers for more information.

**Quartz Well** (accessed through your Quartz MyChart) is available to employees and their spouse when enrolled in our health insurance. Points are accumulated annually to get up to \$100 in Amazon gift cards. Immediately earn \$50 by syncing a fitness device such as a Fitbit or smart phone fitness app. Preventive medical services done through your in-network providers automatically add points to your Quartz Well. Be sure to discover other ways to earn points when participating in this program. You need to check periodically, pull the codes off, and add them into your Amazon account. The codes are deleted at the end of each year, so make sure you get them off before that happens. Reach out to Quartz with any questions about Quartz Well. The phone number is on the back of your insurance card.

**Klempel Insurance Agency,** our voluntary life insurance agent, offers a wellness and prevention cash program to all our employees. Open enrollment for the program is twice a year. You must re-enroll annually to continue participation. Submit itemized bills to Monica at Klempel Insurance to receive cash for you, your spouse, and your children age 25 and under. Contact the Personnel Office for participation information.

**Lifeworks,** our employee assistance program provider, has a fitness app for benefit eligible employees (it is part of our long term disability insurance).



# Welcome to our Team!

*New Employees - September 11, 2022 through March 25, 2023*

- Alesha Erdenberger** ~ September 12 ~ Orchard Manor
- Patricia Skaife** ~ September 13 ~ Social Services
- Nicolas Witzig** ~ September 19 ~ Highway
- John Sewell** ~ September 27 ~ Conservation, Sanitation and Zoning
- Devon Pettera** ~ October 5 ~ Orchard Manor
- Steven Campbell** ~ October 10 ~ Highway
- Scott Knox** ~ October 18 ~ Orchard Manor
- Tonya Miller** ~ November 1 ~ Orchard Manor
- Zachary Olson** ~ November 7 ~ District Attorney's Office
- Haizen Birchman** ~ November 14 ~ Orchard Manor
- Haylie Birchman** ~ November 15 ~ Orchard Manor
- Hannah Shaw** ~ November 15 ~ Orchard Manor
- Dakota White** ~ November 16 ~ Orchard Manor
- Mallory Olmstead** ~ November 23 ~ Orchard Manor
- Taylor Schneider** ~ November 29 ~ Orchard Manor
- Kassidy Embry** ~ December 2 ~ Sheriff's Office
- Ivy Riemenapp** ~ December 5 ~ Clerk of Court's Office
- Emma Addison** ~ December 12 ~ Sheriff's Office
- Elizabeth Charlson-Collins** ~ December 12 ~ Sheriff's Office
- Michaela Nyhus** ~ December 19 ~ Sheriff's Office
- Paige Pluemer** ~ December 23 ~ Orchard Manor
- David Donovan** ~ December 27 ~ Highway
- Melissa Hill** ~ December 27 ~ Health Department
- Ronald Brisbois** ~ January 1 ~ Economic Development
- Abigail Douglas** ~ January 4 ~ Orchard Manor
- Brianna Pierce** ~ January 4 ~ Orchard Manor
- Erin Wolf** ~ January 4 ~ Orchard Manor
- Myah Sierens** ~ January 5 ~ Orchard Manor
- Kevin Kubly** ~ January 18 ~ Orchard Manor
- Jacob Knowles** ~ February 2 ~ Sheriff's Office
- Shannon Winkers** ~ February 6 ~ Clerk of Court's Office
- Alston Schaal** ~ February 9 ~ Orchard Manor
- Steven Jeardeau** ~ February 10 ~ Sheriff's Office
- James Bergles** ~ February 27 ~ Conservation, Sanitation and Zoning
- Sean Dillman** ~ March 13 ~ Highway
- Joseph Maluchnik** ~ March 13 ~ Highway
- Brynley Pritchett** ~ March 13 ~ Orchard Manor
- Bryanna Potter** ~ March 16 ~ Orchard Manor
- Justin Scott** ~ March 16 ~ Orchard Manor
- Juanita Caley** ~ March 17 ~ ADRC
- Michael Ruga** ~ March 20 ~ Veterans Service Office

# Retirement Recognition

September 11, 2022 through March 25, 2023

**Annette Hochhausen** (Clerk of Court's Office), **41 years** (retired September 29)

**Randall Chambers** (Conservation, Sanitation and Zoning), **36 years** (retired December 1)

**David Melssen** (Highway Department), **24 years** (retired December 16)

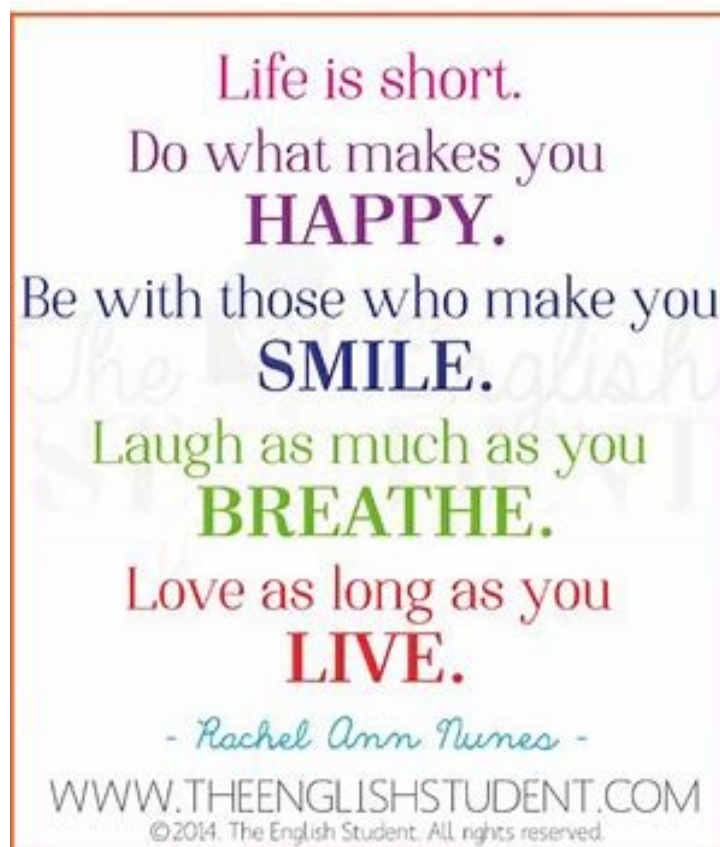
**Kenneth Kirschbaum** (Highway Department), **37 years** (retired January 6)

**Laura Knutson** (Orchard Manor), **8 years** (retired January 6)

**Rachel Bohringer** (Orchard Manor), **25 years** (retired February 2)

***Grant County wishes you a happy and healthy retirement!***

*Reminder: Please contact the County Personnel Office at least two months before your retirement date so we can assist you with the process.*





# Service Anniversaries

January, 2023 through June 30, 2023 (5 year increments)

**Janet Kirschbaum** (Orchard Manor), **35 years** on June 27

**Darla Adams** (District Attorney's Office), **30 years** on January 4

**Leslie Gulliford** (Finance Department), **25 years** on May 8

**Brian Heinrichs** (Fairgrounds), **25 years** on May 4

**Travis Klaas** (Sheriff's Office), **25 years** on February 2

**Craig Reukauf** (Sheriff's Office), **25 years** on June 10

**Andrea Benish** (Social Services), **15 years** on March 3

**Julie Friederick** (Social Services), **15 years** on March 3

**Lisa Kirschbaum** (Orchard Manor), **15 years** on April 9

**Debra (Debi) Reynolds** (Orchard Manor), **15 years** on March 11

**Jerry Vesperman** (Sheriff's Office), **15 years** on January 2

**Benjamin Keller** (Sheriff's Office), **10 years** on January 27

**Lori Reid** (ADRC), **10 years** on June 3

**Hilary Sahr** (Social Services), **10 years** on May 21

**Kaila Scholl** (Orchard Manor), **10 years** on February 7

**David Steinbach** (Highway Department), **10 years** on January 7

**Sheri Zart** (Sheriff's Office), **10 years** on January 13

**Julie Baumgartner** (ADRC), **5 years** on January 15

**Shane Drinkwater** (Information Technology), **5 years** on March 26

**Lori Fernandez** (Orchard Manor), **5 years** on June 6

**Audrey Fotzler** (Sheriff's Office), **5 years** on January 22

**Bryan Heer** (Highway Department), **5 years** on March 12

**Megan Kase** (District Attorney's Office), **5 years** on June 18

**Steven Morgan** (Highway Department), **5 years** on March 19

**Aarica Orth** (Social Services), **5 years** on May 7

**Scott Pierce** (Facilities Maintenance), **5 years** on January 29

**Lorie Schauff** (Orchard Manor), **5 years** on May 8

**Stephani Staskal** (ADRC), **5 years** on February 1

**David Underwood** (Sheriff's Office), **5 years** on April 30

**Roland Young** (ADRC), **5 years** on March 7

# *Unified Community Services of Grant and Iowa Counties*

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Peer  
Specialist  
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Medication  
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Assist  
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Insurance  
Employment  
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And  
Transportation

