

Johnson County's new aging specialist to help seniors

Job created to serve fastest growing age group: 65 and older



Jeff Kellbach, aging specialist, at the Johnson County Health and Human Services building in Iowa City on Wednesday, Feb. 28, 2018. (Stephen Mally/The Gazette)

IOWA CITY — Hanging above Jeff Kellbach's new desk is a yellow sheet of paper with a list of ideas on how to better help local seniors.

Kellbach, Johnson County's first-ever aging specialist, adds ideas to the list — like developing programming for those living with dementia — when he sees a gap in services.

The projects on the list, as well as working with caregiver or senior clients to connect them with services, will be Kellbach's job for the foreseeable future.

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- Jeff Kellbach

Aging Specialist, Johnson County

“We’re still trying to figure out what are all those needs that are being missed,” Kellbach said. “There’s going to be some questions that probably stump me a little bit, and I’m going to have to figure out a little bit more and figure out who those resources are. I’m confident that they exist, and, if they don’t, then they go on my list of things we need in the community.”

Kellbach’s job was created at a time when the demographic group growing the most in the county is 65 and older. That population has increased by almost 33 percent in the last eight years, compared to almost 12 percent growth in 18 to 24 year olds, the next fastest growing group.

“Navigating various and sometimes complex systems, such as health care, housing and supportive services, can be overwhelming,” Lynette Jacoby, the county’s social services director, said in an email. “The goal of the aging specialist is to help break down those barriers and assist aging residents, caregivers, family members and providers to access appropriate services.”

Kellbach, 42, said he studied therapeutic recreation at the University of Iowa with the intention of working with kids as his career.

After college, he said he realized how much he enjoyed working with older adults and took a job at [Pathways Adult Day Health Center](#), where he served as executive director from 2001 to 2017.

“With adults, hearing their experiences is really rewarding,” Kellbach said. “Just hearing about what people have gone through, their experiences, it’s really educational for anybody to be able to talk with anybody and learn about history, their histories.”

Kellbach said he believes the senior population, as a whole, can be underserved at times. Social services and dollars often go toward kids’ programs and recently less money is being devoted to elderly services.

“That’s a concerning issue,” he said. “There’s less money going to them, yet we have a lot more elderly that are going to need services and assistance. And so that’s not the combination we’re looking for, and I think talking about those things provides that opportunity for change.”

In addition to working with clients, Kellbach also will help with the [Johnson County Livable Community effort](#), Jacoby said. That effort’s policy board is a “unifying structure” to spur communication, education and collaboration to push Johnson County to build a livable community for older residents.

Kellbach previously served on the policy board from 2012 to 2017.

“People that are looking for services don’t oftentimes even know where to start,” Kellbach said. “That ties in to what this position is all about — trying to make sure that there’s a go-to person for them.”



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