

2021

ANNUAL REPORT

BESTSELF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

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Greetings from Liz Woike-Ganga, President & CEO

Dear friends,

On behalf of the BestSelf team and Board of Directors, I'm pleased to bring you our 2021 Annual Report. This past year continued to be one of our community's most challenging and historic points in time, as we experienced increased demand for services due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet again we were pushed, yet again we were challenged, yet again we came together and yet again, we met the challenge head on. We did it together.

This moment in time has proven that when we work together, we are able to make a difference. I am inspired by our donors, partners and staff who have risen to the unprecedented challenges of this past year. They have demonstrated resilience and a dedication to the communities we serve.

As the President and CEO of the largest provider of community-based behavioral health services in Western New York, each day I walk through the doors of our headquarters or one of our clinics or programs, I remain humbled and privileged to lead such a vibrant and innovative organization,

Despite uncertainty in the face of a global pandemic that magnified and exposed social and economic inequalities – there was an unwavering commitment to our mission to lead positive systemic change that strengthens our WNY community. BestSelf will continue to pursue racial equity and inclusion in its work and has made this a corporate mission. As part of that effort, BestSelf has provided Racial Equity and Inclusion (REI) 101 Training to 875 employees and will expand that number in 2022. In addition, the company has increased its senior management diversity by 10% and changed policies to be more culturally sensitive and inclusive for Black employees. Though there is more work to do, the agency is proud of how far it has come since 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic has raged since early 2020 and continues to bring it challenges with no end in sight. At the same time, “a second pandemic” is raging and that is the decline of our mental health.

Measures of mental well-being have fallen as people struggle with the climbing death toll and economic hardship. More than 42 percent of US adults reported symptoms of anxiety or depression in a US Census Bureau survey in December 2020. Alcohol consumption and substance abuse increased; and when we needed support most, social distancing kept us apart.

COVID-19 has also deepened existing differences in mental health. For instance, Hispanic adults now report symptoms of depression 59 percent more often than non-Hispanic White adults, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Young people have shown the greatest vulnerability. Rates of substance abuse and recent suicidal thoughts are twice as high among teens as adults. Emergency room visits for mental health concerns are up nearly 50 percent among youth, the CDC reports.

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a rise in opioid use and overdoses. More than 107,000 Americans died from opioid overdoses in 2021. There are many factors at play, namely the fact that we lost our connection to be able to address folks one on one due to isolation. Our goal is to make sure our services and treatment are as accessible as they were prior to the pandemic. Immediate access and nothing less than immediate access is the key to saving lives.

Last year we spoke about difficult economic times, and here we remain fighting to provide access to high quality care. Again, the BestSelf team remained dedicated to meeting our patients and families where they are; and I always say the team may make it look easy, however, it surely is not. Whether expanding telehealth options or providing care right in a community with our Mobile unit, access to culturally sensitive care is a priority.

Our rapid growth as an agency continues to motivate us to do better and do more. BestSelf has more than doubled in size over the past 4 years and now has an annual budget of \$91 million, a workforce of 1,300+ employees, and serves more than 41,000 children and adults in 70+ locations in Western New York. Last year we announced our \$20 million project to transform 899 Main Street in downtown Buffalo into a new corporate headquarters and home for the Child Advocacy Center at BestSelf (CAC). Programs like the Child Advocacy Center, are unable to serve the true need for childhood trauma services and with our continued focus on this expansion we are one step closer to opening the doors.

With growth comes the ever-present need to recruit, train and retain talented staff. Adding to the challenge is the “great resignation” across the Country in the past year. At BestSelf we are relentlessly focused on employee engagement and professional development, two pillars in our recruitment and retention strategy. As well, to multiply our feet on the ground, we have an increased focus on cultivating community partnerships and collaborations especially in underserved communities.

Where do we go from here? We must see the positive in every negative. The positive impact from the pandemic is the change in awareness of mental health issues. Suddenly, where there was once only stigma and shame, there is a sense of compassion that any of us may experience mental health concerns. Increasing awareness and acceptance of mental health issues is a critical step toward addressing them.

In partnership and health,

Liz



The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)

GRANTED OVER \$400,000

BestSelf was selected as a participant of their Value in Opioid Use Disorder Treatment Demonstration Program, is a 4-year demonstration program whose purpose is to “increase access of applicable beneficiaries to opioid use disorder treatment services, improve physical and mental health outcomes for such beneficiaries, and to the extent possible, reduce Medicare program expenditures.

The New York State Education Department (NYSED)

GRANTED \$1,600,000

to enable BestSelf’s Building Brighter Futures (BBF) to continue providing Extended School Day/School Violence Prevention Program (ESD/SVP) programming at B.E.S.T. School #6, in partnership with Buffalo Public School District. Continuation of the program is needed to support the academic achievement and social-emotional development of at-risk students.

GRANTED \$1,600,000

to expand the Gen Z Café model to include middle school students. This enhancement to our current programming will serve to bridge the gap in social emotional development that has occurred for many students because of the pandemic. It will also serve to help engage students by including them in the process of planning and implementation. The project will serve up to 270 students.

2021 Grant Summary

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

GRANTED \$625,000

Mental Health Awareness Training Grant:

to provide mental health awareness trainings to the community including Mental Health First Aid, Youth Mental Health First Aid, and Teen Mental Health First Aid.

GRANTED \$2,000,000

National Child Traumatic Stress Initiative:

(Category 3) to provide mobile trauma treatment services for children, youth, and their families in Erie, Cattaraugus, and Chautauqua Counties.

GRANTED \$5,000,000

Community Mental Health Center Grant:

to serve 550 individuals with serious emotional disturbance (SED), serious mental illness (SMI), and/or individuals with co-occurring disorder (COD) residing in Erie, Niagara, Cattaraugus, and Allegany Counties located in Western New York, per year.

GRANTED \$2,625,000

Medication-Assisted Treatment – Prescription

Drug and Opioid Addiction (MAT-PDOA) Grant:

to fund the Western New York Regional 24-7 Virtual On-Call MAT Center, which will expand, enhance, and sustain access to medication-assisted treatment (MAT) services and recovery supports for 456 individuals with opioid use disorder (OUD) over five years.

The Erie County Youth Bureau

AWARDED \$7,500

in funding to support positive youth development and social emotional learning in school-age programs. This funding fills in some of the gaps in BBF program funding resulting from inflexible/limited funding sources.

The WNY COVID-19 Community Response Fund

GRANTED \$23,135

to support virtual learning center operations and programs at Elmwood Village Charter School. If these funds are not completely expended for that purpose, any remaining funds may be used for summer programming.

The Mother Cabrini Health Foundation

GRANTED \$350,000

to sustain the BestSelf Primary and Behavioral Health Care Integration (PBHCI) program until a sustainable model is developed.



The Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Foundation

AWARDED \$700,000

through the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, granted the following:

\$25,000

from their After School Care Fund to support virtual learning programs.

\$63,360

Through the Generator Z Grant Making Initiative, Building Brighter Futures developed the Gen Z Zen Café – where teens will co-create a social dinner club where they will work together to plan the weekly menu, cook and enjoy a meal together while addressing topics that are important to them with the help of specially trained staff who are prepared to dive into topics such as mental health and wellness, social-emotional learning, stress management, creative expression, and navigating a confusing, stressful world.

\$15,000

in Wilson Legacy Funding – Infusing the Power of Sport, Play, and Emotional Wellness into Out of School Time to support sports-based programming to students enrolled in Building Brighter Futures.

National Grid's Main Street Revitalization Program

AWARDED \$250,000

in Capital funding for BestSelf Behavioral Health Headquarters and Child Advocacy Center at BestSelf.

United Way of Buffalo and Erie County

GAVE \$200,000

in funding to support the following programs: Building Brighter Futures High School and School Aged Programs, Child Advocacy Center, Parent Child Interaction Therapy, and Dialectical Behavior Therapy.

The New York State Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS)

AWARDED \$92,100

awarded BestSelf a Child Care Stabilization Grant to offset the unexpected costs of BBF's Advantage Afterschool Grant in light of OCFS restrictions. The grants are made available through federal funding related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The New York State Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS)

through the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo

GRANTED \$200,000

to outfit and start-up a Mobile Medication Unit to provide ongoing Opioid Treatment Programming to individuals who may not be located near a brick and mortar location.

GRANTED \$510,596

in workforce and stabilization funding to support recruitment, retention, and fiscal and programmatic stabilization efforts related to the pandemic.

The New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH)

GRANTED \$570,000

to be used for workforce recruitment and retention activities.

The Hollister Confidence Fund

GRANTED \$50,000

to Building Brighter Futures (BBF) to fill the existing gaps in funding for BBF including expanded tier 2 interventions to support teen mental wellness.

Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative (ESSHI)

A. AWARDED \$4,125,000

Manhattan Project: to provide 33 supportive housing units.

B. AWARDED \$9,375,000

Alembic/St. Ann's Campus Project: to provide 75 supportive housing units.

C. AWARDED \$1,500,000

Project Hopeful/Sumner Place: to provide 12 supportive housing units.

D. AWARDED \$4,327,000

to provide 35 supportive housing units.



2021 was a successful year for grants! BestSelf secured over 34 million dollars to implement new programs, expand existing services, and sustain vital programs. We are extremely grateful to all of our funders who make it possible for us to continue to provide innovative, evidence-based, accessible, and family-focused behavioral health services to Western NY.



Agency and Individual Awards



Lindsey Dotson

DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

Lindsey was awarded 40 under 40 by Buffalo Business First.

Joe Martino

PROGRAM DIRECTOR, CLUBWEST

Joe was awarded 30 under 30 by Buffalo Business First.



Joe DiStasio, CPA

CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

Joe was awarded the Business First C-level Executive Award.



Sherika Willis-Kimble, CASAC-T

PROGRAM DIRECTOR OF THE
LIGHTHOUSE WOMEN'S RESIDENCE

Sherika was posthumously awarded the WNYCDC Gold Key Award for her lifetime of work in the field of behavioral health including her role as Program Director of BestSelf's Lighthouse Women's Residence.



BestSelf's Vocational Program

PROGRAM DIRECTOR: MICHAEL PIENIAZEK

WHY FOCUS ON EMPLOYMENT?

- Viewed by many as an essential part of recovery
- Most consumers want to work
- A typical role for adults in our society
- Cost-effective alternative to day treatment

EFFECTS OF UNEMPLOYMENT

- Increased substance abuse
- Increased psychiatric disorders
- Reduced self-esteem
- Alienation

BENEFITS OF EMPLOYMENT

- Increased income
- Improved self-esteem
- Increased social and quality of life
- Better control of symptoms
- Reduced substance use
- Reduced hospitalization

“

I worried that if my son got a job he would get stressed. But just the opposite happened. He is doing so much better than before.

“

Now that I am working again I can buy my daughter presents.

“

I want to work because I don't want to be in this program when I am old.



Child Advocacy Center Fundraising



WOMEN'S COMMITTEE AT TRANSIT VALLEY COUNTRY CLUB'S ANNUAL GOLF OUTING

On August 5, 2021 the Women's Committee of Transit Valley Country Club hosted 110 golfers at their annual golf tournament. We are pleased to announce they raised \$33,500 this year, their biggest year yet! Proceeds will benefit the Child Advocacy Center at BestSelf, specifically the relocation to 899 Main Street. Thank you so much for your support!

BESTSELF GOLF OUTING RAISES MORE THAN \$50,000 FOR THE CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER

On July 26, 2021, 132 golfers joined us at Park Country Club for the annual BestSelf Golf Outing. We are excited to report this year's event raised more than \$50,000! All proceeds will benefit the Child Advocacy Center at BestSelf, an innovative, comprehensive center offering safety, support and a healing place for children and families affected by abuse in Erie County.

Congratulations to our first place team with a score of 56, Pamica Modrzynski, Michael Modrzynski, Andy Terranova, and Bobby Manley; our second place team with a score of 57, Kevin O'Leary, Nick Zinter, Philip Occhino, and Billy Occhino; our closest to the pin winner with a hole in one, Bill Murray; and our longest drive winner, Mike Russo.

A special thank you to our sponsors Uniland, Northwest, The Franklin Partnership, Savarino Companies, CJS Architects, Howard Hanna, M&T Bank, Merrill Lynch, Parkview RX, Riverview RX, United Insurance Agency, Catapult, Eagle Systems, NKM Contracting, Ulrich Signs, KeyBank, our birdie sponsors, and all of our golfers who joined us! We appreciate everyone's support!

WARM HEARTS PROMOTION RAISES FUNDS FOR CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER

The second annual Warm hearts promotion featuring the hot chocolate snowball bombs was held in December 2021, raising \$3,000 for the Child Advocacy Center at BestSelf. A special thank you to Park Edge Sweet Shoppe for their continued support.

APRIL IS CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH

On February 26, 2020, individuals from the Western New York community joined us in the Mary Seaton Room at Kleinhan's for Breakfast for Bold Voices. This event featured a complimentary breakfast, networking, a presentation illustrating our vision for the new Child Advocacy Center at BestSelf, and an opportunity to give. We are excited to report, we not only shared the story of the Child Advocacy Center with more than 200 attendees, but we also raised over \$25,000!



Success Stories

ACT EXPANSION TEAM | CLIENT 1

Our client began working with the ACT Expansion team following one of his first psychotic episodes and hospitalizations. The client was discharged to a group home through TSI with no insight, started on a new antipsychotic injection, and was very minimal in engagement, although pleasant.

Since working with the team, this client has remained out of the hospital, remained medication adherent, increased engagement with the team, has been transitioned to an apartment with 1 roommate, and eventually moved to his own apartment where he has remained independent. The client began taking classes at ECC for HVAC studies 2 years ago and will be graduating this month. He has obtained part-time employment while attending classes, which continues today. The client has increased his rapport with the team and travels independently via public transportation for work and to socialize with friends and family. The client is up to date on medical/dental appointments and has not decompensated once since working with the team.

The client has increased his insight into his mental health, reports thankfulness for his services, and reports a desire for full independence in the future, possibly moving to be closer to family in another state, while remaining on his medication and seeking clinic-based counseling services. This client has been discussing clinic-based service transition from the team once he graduates from college.

ACT EXPANSION TEAM | CLIENT 2

Our client began working with the ACT Expansion team about 3 years ago upon discharge from an inpatient hospitalization to a TSI apartment with a roommate. The client reported fair insight into their symptoms, recognizing a typical cycling of symptoms of psychosis, experiencing more intense “episodes” during the beginning of summer.

Since working with the team, this client has been briefly hospitalized twice with medication changes. Since the second medication change, the client has reported no longer experiencing baseline symptoms of psychosis, reports getting a more “normal” range of sleep, and has gotten to a comfortable, healthy weight. The client has since moved into his own apartment, started a serious relationship and moved in with his significant other, and has recently bought a house and gotten married. The client has not been hospitalized since his most recent medication change, continues to deny any symptoms of psychosis, began working a part-time job from home, and has had a child with his wife in their new home.



From Client to Program Director

AN EMPLOYEE SUCCESS STORY



Joseph Martino has experienced immense personal and professional growth in his life, particularly over the past four years. Through the experience of his own behavioral health challenges, Joe worked hard to begin and maintain his own path of recovery.

Joe experienced a history of trauma, behavioral health challenges, and homelessness before he engaged with treatment and worked hard to overcome his history. His success with treatment and willingness to help others was quickly recognized by staff and he was invited to participate in the BestSelf's Consumer Advisory Panel (CAP). The CAP is comprised of consumer representatives from each program who meet monthly to review client surveys, provide feedback on client experience, and to help inform the quality improvement process. It did not take long for Joe to become a vital member of the panel, encouraging others and contributing feedback and suggestions that led to improvements within the agency.

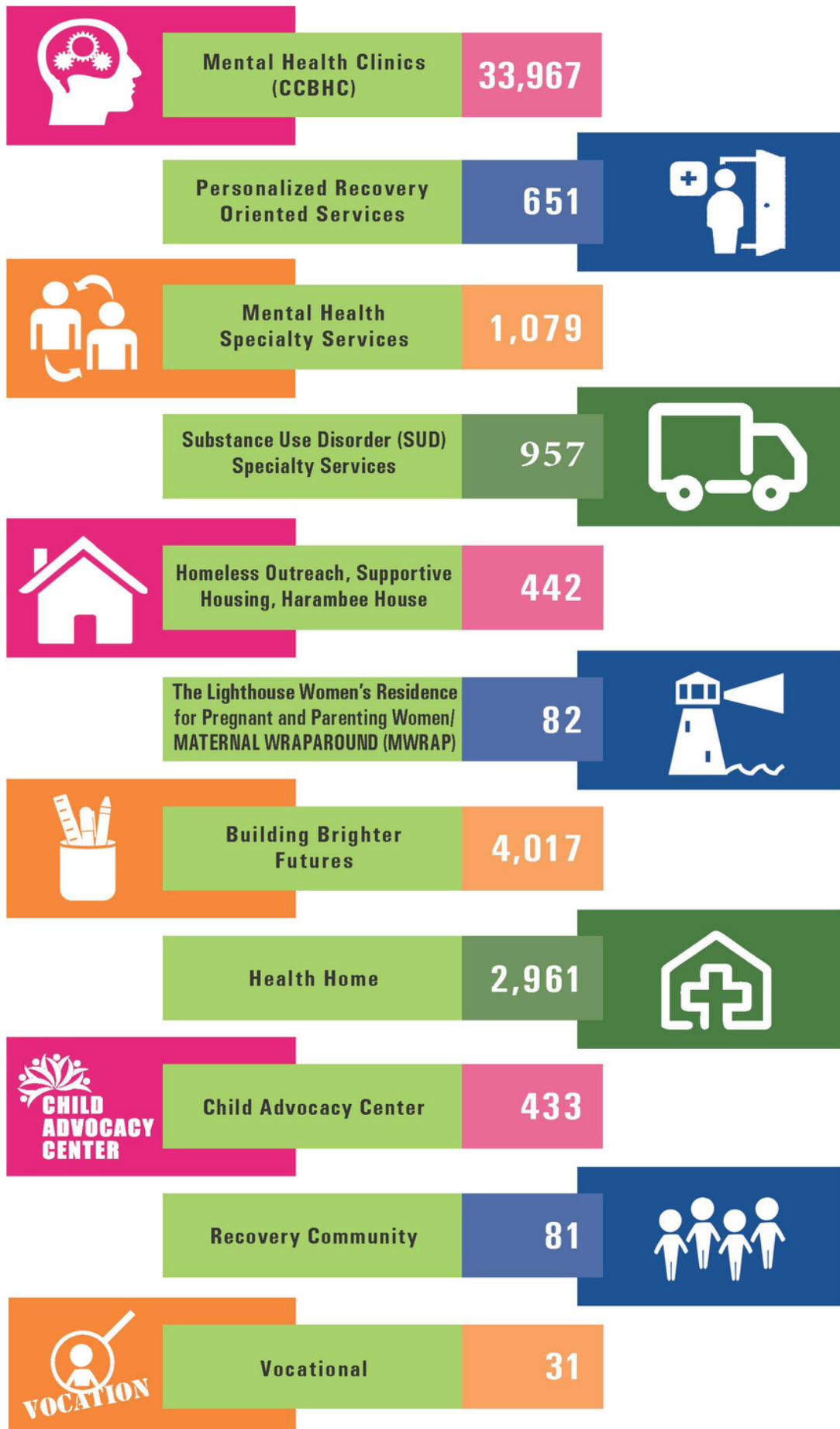
It was clear to anyone working with Joe that he was ready to take on the role of peer advocate at the agency. A peer advocate is someone who has “lived” experience and is able to provide support for clients as someone who has been where they are. In 2017, Joe was hired as the first ever peer advocate within any OnTrackNY program, across the state. OnTrackNY is an innovative treatment program for adolescents and young adults between the ages of 16 and 30 who have recently begun experiencing psychotic symptoms, such as hallucinations, unusual thoughts or beliefs, or disorganized thinking, for more than a week but less than 2 years. OnTrackNY helps people achieve their goals for school, work, and relationships, and Joe helped to develop a peer services curriculum for OnTrackNY that is used by peers throughout the state. Joe did this while simultaneously learning his new role, and earning his Peer Specialist NYS Certification.

"I often look back at where I came from and realize where I am now and can't help but think of the wild journey I took to get here. My recovery is one of the most important aspects of my life. The effort I put in and the work I did on myself really did pay off. I was afforded the opportunity everyday to walk alongside people on their journey of recovery and now have the ability to influence that culture in a broader way. All of the things I have experienced in my life are tools for helping others. The empathy and mutuality that I have with people suffering from mental illness and addiction is crucial for doing my job to the best of my ability."

Most recently, Joe was promoted to the Program Director of Clubwest at BestSelf. This promotion is a direct result of his ongoing initiative, leadership, and dedication to himself and the participants we serve.

"If I can say anything at all, It's that you should never give up on your dreams and never think that recovery isn't possible. I live a somewhat “normal” life today. I was able to get my license back and buy a car on my own, met, proposed and married my best friend, bought a house and welcomed a beautiful baby girl into this world. This all wouldn't have been possible without the attitude that there is light at the end of this dark ominous tunnel of mental illness and the gratitude I have for the process and people that guided me along the way."

Persons served by Best Self Behavioral Health 2021



Being our **BEST** together!





HEALING BEGINS TOGETHER #JeffersonAveStrong

best|self
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

BestSelf's 2021 Annual Report is dedicated to the 10 lives that were taken in the racist attack at Tops Friendly Market on March 14th, 2022 in the Jefferson Avenue neighborhood in Buffalo, NY.

BestSelf stands united against racism, hatred and violence and we stand united with our Black community.

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