

Tri-County Opportunities Council
Board of Directors Meeting
June 27, 2024

Chair Harmon called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. He welcomed Stephanie Foes, the new Bureau County Category B Board Member, and reminded those attending virtually to mute themselves when not speaking.

The membership recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Ms. Calkins, President/CEO, took roll call. A quorum was present.

Members Present: (In-person participants are bolded)

Reed Akre, **Charlotte Balensiefen**, Sue Britt, Robin Camplain, **Bernene Dahl**, Kim Dahl, **David Ditzler**, **Stephanie Foes**, **Al Harmon**, **Marcia Heuer**, **John Hockstadt**, Julie Jacobs, **Betty Johnson**, **Lisa Johnson**, **Ron Kleppin**, Kenneth Krogulski, Ronald Preston, Juanita Randklev, Becky Rich, **David Torres**, **Jeanne Vargas**.

Members Absent:

Susan Bursztynsky, Mary Cork, Lynnae Garrett, BJ Holocker, Tom Howes, Kristy Jones, Betsy Kinder, Brad Lindstrom, Ginny McPerryman, Inga Neuner, Linda Pennell, Michael McEmery, Denise Russell, Marissa Trumper, and Laura Watters, Derek Whited Lorene Winfield.

Others Present:

Jill Calkins, Rachael DeSpain, Vanessa Hoffeditz, Tammy Saenz, Wayne Thompson, Neddie Watts.

Minutes:

The May 28, 2024 Board minutes were previously sent to all members for review. Ms. Lisa Johnson made a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. Balensiefen seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion carried.

Financial Report:

The April 2024 Financial Reports were provided to the membership for review prior to tonight's meeting. Mr. Kleppin made a motion to accept the April 2024 Financial Reports and file them for audit. Mr. Hockstadt seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Fiscal Report: Dawn Kanzler's report was given by Ms. Calkins

Approval was sought to file the 2023 Tri-County Opportunities Council's IRS Form 990 and Illinois Form AG990 as per the recommendation of the Audit/Finance Committee. Ms. Balensiefen made a motion to approve the filings per the recommendation of the Audit/Finance Committee. Ms. Betty Johnson seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Action to approve the Agency's 2023 Form 5500 Annual Return/Report of Employee Benefit Plan as per the recommendation of the Audit/Finance Committee was sought. Ms. Lisa Johnson made a motion to

approve the Agency's 2023 Form 5500 Annual Return/Report of Employee Benefit Plan. Ms. Vargas seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Approval was sought to file the indirect cost rate proposal for calendar year 2023, as per the recommendation of the Audit/Finance Committee. Mr. Hockstadt made a motion to approve the filing. Mr. Kleppin seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Approval was sought to renew the Agency's line of credit at \$600,000 with Sauk Valley Bank, effective August 1, 2024. Ms. Vargas made a motion to approve the renewal of the Agency's line of credit at \$600,000. Ms. Balensiefen seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Lastly, action was sought to approve Jill Calkins, President/CEO, as the authorized signer for the line of credit renewal. Ms. Vargas made a motion to approve Jill Calkins, President/CEO, as the authorized signer for the line of credit renewal. Mr. Kleppin seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

The ending book balance for May was (261,926.58). A balance of \$417,602 was owed on the line of credit to Sauk Valley Bank as of May 31, 2024. As Ms. Kanzler mentioned last month, receiving cash requests from the state is taking twice as long. Discussion followed regarding the financial impact this has on the Agency due to interest charges.

The Agency's package and umbrella insurance policies with Philadelphia were renewed effective July 1, 2024, with an increase of 8.5% or \$12,595 for an annual premium of \$161,122. The property and casualty (liability) market has been stable; however, concerning claim trends with social inflation and nuclear verdicts are being monitored. The commercial auto market is also experiencing rising costs of repairs and liability payouts that could increase renewals in the future.

Among the Board handouts are minutes from the May Audit/Finance Committee Meeting and a required communication letter from Sikich that provides the membership with information related to the Agency audit.

Program Reports:

Community Services Block Grant (CSBG): Neddie Watts

Ms. Watts sought Board approval to accept an additional \$76,852.21 to the 2025 DHS Homeless Prevention Program to help sustain housing for households at risk of becoming homeless, which will begin in July. Ms. Lisa Johnson made a motion to accept the additional DHS Homeless Prevention funds of \$76,852.21. Ms. Balensiefen seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Ms. Watts reported that the board packets included a copy of a new flyer that will be used during community events, provided to partners, and posted in organizations, businesses, etc. The flyer includes all of the contact information for each program per county.

Also included in the packets was an update for Strategic Plan Goal Four: Poverty-Focused-Family-Centered. She stated that their next meeting would be in early July since other planning committees were meeting in June. This meeting will finalize survey questions to be distributed in August to gather input on customer satisfaction.

Additionally, she informed the Planning/Evaluation Committee that she would be setting a few Zoom meetings in July so the Committee can help review data to develop work programs per the new Community Needs Assessment and Community Action Plan guidelines. She stated she will mail the data along with the meeting dates. She encouraged other members to join this committee and participate in these meetings. If interested, she requested they contact her by Tuesday, July 2.

She happily reported that the Outreach Workers that cover Whiteside and Lee County would be moving to their new location at 300 1st Avenue, Suite 3, in Rock Falls, on July 1, along with two LIHEAP employees and one Head Start employee, with other employees from Weatherization joining at a later date. She stated that this new module is part of the Agency's Strategic Planning process of bundling services. For example, when someone applies for LIHEAP and tells that employee they need help with rent, they can walk them to the CSBG Outreach Worker to apply because they already have most of the paperwork required to apply for LIHEAP. If they have children under 5, a Head Start employee will begin their paperwork. She referred to it as a "one-stop shop." This will help customers apply for services quickly and more efficiently.

In addition to the new move, she stated that CSBG Outreach Workers can schedule appointments online using a new software system called Calendly. Customers seeking services can go directly to our website, click on their county, enter their contact information, and click on any services they are seeking. They will then be directed to another screen to choose the best date and time that works for them based on that particular Outreach Worker's calendar. After scheduling the appointment, the customer will receive an email confirming the appointment and will receive a text and email the day before the appointment. The services they seek to apply for will also be indicated during the scheduling process. This new option will also help them apply for services faster and prevent the back and forth of returning phone calls, leaving voicemails, etc.

The 2nd Annual TCOC Charity Softball Tournament and Family Picnic is underway. Due to a state tournament, the date had to be changed from August 10th to September 28th. The tournament will be held at the same location and in the same fashion as last year. They are currently looking for raffle basket donations and are seeking help in selling 50/50 tickets. Flyers were brought to tonight's meeting for members to take if they know of anyone or any business who would be willing to donate a raffle basket. Any support from Board members is greatly appreciated. Ms. Vos will provide more information in next month's Board packets.

Foster Grandparents: Brandi Newell's report was given by Ms. Calkins

Foster Grandparent Program Director, Ms. Newell, attended the Points of Light conference June 11-14 in Houston. The Conference is dedicated to mobilizing global volunteer efforts and offers many great breakout sessions centered around recruitment, retention, utilization, and recognition of volunteers. The Central Illinois Volunteer Conference is happening this week in Springfield, focusing on much of the same on a more local level.

Invitations for interviews were mailed to twelve new applicants on file. Additional applications arrive weekly. Throughout July, their office will vet applicants and initiate background checks before moving forward with New Volunteer Orientation in August.

The program was awarded an Illinois Department on Aging grant in the amount of \$44,512. This grant satisfies the 10% match requirement for our AmeriCorps Seniors grant.

The Foster Grandparent Program is utilizing local teen volunteers to help seniors navigate technology challenges. Throughout June and July, Foster Grandparent Volunteers and community members are invited to bring their tricky tech questions to the Rock Falls office on Tuesdays from 1 pm to 4 pm. Tech Tuesday will not be hosted the week of July 4th. They hope this outreach helps the volunteers and others in the community who struggle to keep up in our fast-paced, tech-savvy society.

Early Head Start/Head Start Program: Rachael DeSpain

Ms. DeSpain sought Board action to approve the Tri-County Opportunities Council Early Head Start/Head Start Policy Council By-Laws, which include the Policy Council's composition. The Board is responsible for approving the composition of the Policy Council. Copies of the By-Laws were distributed during the May Board meeting. Ms. Vargas made a motion to approve the Policy Council By-Laws. Ms. Betty Johnson seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Staffing shortages continue, but on a good note, the program has hired nine employees in the last two weeks, with four more in the hiring process.

While they have had limited time to place focus here, Ms. Calkins and Ms. DeSpain continue to consider enrollment and staffing challenges, potential changes to the options offered, and the dialogue being had at both the State and Federal levels regarding the future of early childhood education. Ensuring the program remains viable throughout the communities served is a top priority, and discussions will continue.

The program is transitioning one of Sterling's two Early Head Start Center Base classrooms to Streator. For over ten years, the program has maintained a lengthy waitlist in the Streator community, including children under three eligible for in-person early childhood services. Efforts are underway to finalize the move, hire staff, and recruit families.

The leadership team's priorities remain updating, understanding, and applying Service Delivery Plans, continuing to engage in and plan for potential changes to Head Start Performance Standards, solidifying 2024-2025 staff professional development opportunities, and interviewing, selecting, and hiring qualified staff.

Emphasis on locating, attending, and bringing awareness to Agency services during community events remains a top priority. Please continue to offer any information regarding upcoming community events in your area. Board engagement at these events is not only welcomed but encouraged.

Ms. DeSpain provided a handout and shared with the membership the importance of family engagement events. She explained that family engagement is the act of engaging families in their child's education by developing, maintaining, and supporting relationships and shared experiences. She explained that family services are central to the comprehensive services provided by the program. Parents are their child's first and most important teachers. Family engagement events are fueled by the shared passion of parents and staff and encompass things such as curriculum planning, menu planning, parent networking, Policy Council, etc.

Ms. DeSpain shared and reviewed the 2023-2024 School Readiness Report provided in tonight's handouts. She brought attention to the baseline skills seen in children at the beginning of the year and, most importantly, the significant gains seen over the school year in all domains. A deep analysis of this information will aid the program in identifying trends, setting future goals, and developing staff training.

In tonight's handouts, Ms. DeSpain also provided a copy of the May 2024 Board Report, the enrollment status report, and a register of vacant positions. Please encourage interested candidates to visit the Agency website at www.tcochelps.org or call 1-800-323-5434. In conclusion, she reminded Board members to fill out the In-Kind/Volunteer sheet for any time spent reading over materials previously handed out.

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP): Tammy Saenz

Ms. Saenz reported that applications have slowed down. However, in an effort to serve all in need, they have been calling customers who have not yet applied this program year. They will likely have money to operate through August 15, the end of the LIHEAP program year. The furnace program ended May 31, with \$175,865.13 being spent during the eight months the program operated.

They are in the process of re-certifying PIPP customers for the upcoming year to determine their eligibility to remain in the program. The customers who have been on the program for the last few years have truly benefited. Many have managed to get their balances paid and no longer need the program.

Some new projects are coming in the next program year. Illinois Solar for All will offer a solar subscription program for income-eligible households. In addition, low-income discount rates for Ameren

gas and Nicor gas customers will be implemented statewide beginning October 1. More information will be provided in the upcoming months.

Weatherization/Housing Program: Wayne Thompson

Mr. Thompson reported that the Weatherization Department is winding down the DEO grant portion of the Weatherization Program. The last day of the Program is June 30. The contractors will work through this weekend. The remaining funds left in the HHS and State programs will be rolled over into a “Grant Carryover Period” and must be spent by September 30. They will exhaust these carryover funds and some 2025 grant funds, completing the multi-unit.

They have received the HHS and State grant agreements and the DOE BIL Modification grant for the 2025 program year. They are still awaiting the DOE Grant Agreement and expect to receive it soon. The Weatherization Department has continued working on the 70-unit multi-project Victor Meadow Senior Living apartments in Princeton. They will complete two buildings by this weekend and have them inspected first thing next week.

The program was selected for Department of Energy (DOE) Monitoring. The week of July 15, DOE representatives will visit the Agency, review files, and inspect work completed at the Princeton Multi-Unit Project and four single-family homes.

Mr. Thompson reported that the Agency had a small fire at one of the rental units in Sterling. There were no injuries and minimal damage, and they hope to have the families back in the units by tomorrow evening.

President/CEO’s Report: Jill Calkins

Ms. Calkins reported that there is currently one Board vacancy: LaSalle County Category B.

Members received a copy of the Strategic Plan Progress Reports in tonight's handouts, with information regarding the communication, customer satisfaction, and staff retention goals. Ms. Calkins reported that committee groups are meeting and making steady progress. She encouraged any members interested in joining one of the committee groups to reach out.

Scholarship winners must submit their fall schedules by June 29, 2024. Ms. Calkins reported that she has received about nine thus far. Once all schedules are received, checks will be mailed to the respective colleges.

Ms. Calkins reminded members that the July Meeting will be held at the Mendota Civic Center and will be an in-person meeting only. Scholarship award winners will be invited to be recognized by the Board of Directors. A variety of appetizers will be available. Unfortunately, Ms. Calkins will be unable to attend, but Ms. Kanzler has graciously agreed to sit in her place, and Ms. Watts has agreed to announce the scholarship winners who are in attendance and provide them with a certificate.

Each year at the annual meeting, Board members are recognized for their service on the Board. Recognition is awarded in five-year increments. Ms. Calkins recognized the following members. A certificate and a small gift of appreciation will be delivered to them.

- Marissa Trumper (5 years)
- Julie Jacobs (20 years)

Old Business:

There was no old business at this time.

New Business:

The Nominating Committee recommended the re-election of the slate of officers as follows:

- Albert Harmon, Chairperson
- Jeanne Vargas, Vice-Chairperson
- Julie Jacobs, Secretary
- Susan Bursztynsky, Treasurer

Board action was sought to approve the slate of officers as recommended by the Nominating Committee. Ms. Bernene Dahl made a motion to approve the slate of officers as recommended. Mr. Hockstadt seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Ms. Calkins informed the membership that check signers also needed to be named for the 2024-25 year. Presently, it is the Board Chairperson and Treasurer. Ms. Lisa Johnson made a motion to continue having the Board Chairperson and Treasurer named as the Agency check signers. Mr. Kleppin seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Ms. Calkins also informed the membership that signers for Agency documents need to be authorized for the 2024-2025 year. Presently, they are the four Board officers and/or the President/CEO. In addition, on some grants, the Fiscal Operations Manager is deemed the signatory "designee" for a time when the President/CEO may not be available. The Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) will only accept the President/CEO's signature and/or their designee. Ms. Randklev made a motion to keep the current signers for Agency documents as the four Board officers, the President/CEO, and/or her designee, the Fiscal Operations Manager. Mr. Kleppin seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Next Meeting:

The next Board meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, July 23, 2024, at the Mendota Civic Center, 1901 Tom Merwin Drive, Mendota, IL 61342, at 6:00 p.m. **This will be an in-person meeting only.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:20 p.m.