

**Tri-County Opportunities Council
Board of Directors Meeting
April 27, 2023**

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Chair Harmon.

Ms. Jacob, Board Secretary, took roll call. A quorum was present.

The membership recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Members Present: (In-person participants are bolded)

Charlotte Balensiefen; Sue Britt; Susan Bursztynsky; Mary Jo Credi; **Bernene Dahl; Al Harmon; John Hockstadt; Tom Howes; Marcia Heuer; Betty Johnson; Lisa Johnson;** Julie Jacobs; **Ron Kleppin; Don Koehler; Donna Koehler;** Kenneth Krogulski; Michael McEmery; **Ginny McPerryman;** Inga Neuner; Linda Pennell; Ronald Preston; Juanita Randklev; Angela Shippert; **David Torres; Marissa Trumper;** Jeanne Vargas; Laura Watters; **Derek Whited;** Lorene Winfield.

Members Absent:

Karla Belzer; Robin Camplain; Mary Cork; Kim Dahl; David Ditzler; Jenny Lawrence; Charles Lenkaitis; Brad Lindstrom; Daniel Payette.

Others Present:

Jill Calkins; Rachael DeSpain; Dawn Kanzler; Brandi Newell; Wayne Thompson; Neddie Watts.

Minutes:

March 21, 2023, Board minutes were previously sent to all members for review. Ms. Randklev made a motion to approve the minutes. Mr. Preston seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion carried.

Financial Report:

The February 2023 Financial Reports were provided to the membership prior to tonight's meeting for review. Ms. Lisa Johnson made a motion to accept the February 2023 Financial Reports and file for audit. Mr. Koehler seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Fiscal Report, Dawn Kanzler

Ms. Kanzler shared that the ending book balance for March was (\$51,295.79) and a balance of \$500,000 was owed on the line of credit to Sauk Valley Bank as of March 31, 2023.

The agency-wide audit has been completed and is under review with the Senior Manager and Partner from WIPFLI. I announced last month that the Audit/Finance Committee would meet next month at 5:00 pm on May 23, 2023, in Sterling. A light supper will be provided. The draft audit will be mailed to all board members the week of May 8, 2023.

Program Reports:

Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), Neddie Watts

Board approval is needed to apply for the Bureau County United Way grant for \$7,500. Funds will be used to purchase food for the Bureau County Food Pantry. Ms. Lisa Johnson made a motion to approve the application submission for the Bureau County United Way grant. Ms. Dahl seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Board Action is needed to apply for the 2024 DHS Homeless Prevention grant, in the amount of \$117,186, to provide rent, deposit, and mortgage assistance to households experiencing an economic crisis. Ms. Balensiefen made a motion to approve the submission of the application for the DHS Homeless Prevention Grant. Ms. Randklev seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Board approval is needed to apply for \$13,000 for the Emergency and Transitional Housing program funded by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS). These funds would be used for the Voucher Shelter program to provide emergency shelter for those unable to stay at a homeless shelter due to a criminal background or closure of the shelter. Ms. McPerryman made a motion to approve the submission of the application for the Emergency and Transitional Housing program. Ms. Neuner seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Board approval is needed to apply for \$60,000 for the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) Rapid Rehousing program funded by HUD and distributed through the Continuum of Care. These funds would be used to help individuals that are literally homeless obtain permanent housing with funding towards deposit, rent, or utilities. Ms. Koehler made a motion to approve the submission of the application for ESG Rapid Rehousing. Ms. Balensiefen seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Ms. Watts reported that the DHS Homeless Prevention, Voucher Shelter, and ESG Rapid Rehousing grants are getting close to being spent. All three of these grants end on June 30. She has begun the process of applying for the 2024 grants, which consists of budgets and narratives, recommendation letters from other organizations, and certification for local approval from mayors within the service area.

The ESG-CV grant, which ends September 30, still has funding available to help those with rent and deposit assistance. She stated that the program is designed to prepare for, respond to, and prevent the spread of COVID-19. Most applications are focused on those with a medical condition that would make them at higher risk of getting COVID-19 if they became homeless.

Ms. Watts reported that included in their Board packets was a back-to-back form with information from all grants in a table format. Each report indicates the amount they proposed to serve and the actual number of persons served from the grant year. The report is a quarterly report in which information is reported to grant managers.

She indicated that the CSBG grant is being spent quickly, especially in the client assistance category. To ensure that they are helping those most in need, outreach is focusing on needs versus wants with customers. If an individual returns repeatedly for a service, they will be referred to another organization unless staff can clearly see the need. For example, a handful of individuals come in for personal care items yearly, get new tires every couple of years, or seek a food voucher simultaneously every year. In these situations, staff will use different financial curriculums to help customers visualize spending habits and offer more in-depth budgeting techniques.

On a positive note regarding CSBG funding, the STEP Program is the number one program being spent very quickly. There are 11 individuals in the progress of earning a certificate to become employed at a job that makes a living wage or higher. She stated that she had never seen so many people interested in the program before and could not wait to hear success stories.

She had an Outreach Worker reach out to her a few weeks ago to tell her about one of her past clients whom we helped earn his CDL in 2021. He had a rough life and served prison time for a few years. After he was released, he decided to change his life around and began to seek a way to become employed. After enrolling in the STEP program to obtain a CDL, he attended every class and reported his progress to the Outreach Worker weekly. After receiving his new license, he immediately found a job, started making over \$20 an hour, and received benefits. The Outreach Worker heard from him a few weeks ago. He called to ask if there were anyone who would be obtaining a CDL soon and looking for a job. He had become an employer for his own trucking company and wanted to give someone else who participated in the STEP Program the first chance to work for him. Ms. Watts stated that this is a proven fact of the STEP Program's impact and the difference it is making in the lives of those we serve.

Foster Grandparents, Brandi Newell

Ms. Newell sought Board approval to submit an application to the Illinois Department on Aging in the amount of \$46,514.00. The grant period is from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024. These funds pay for the Assistant Coordinator's salary and administrative costs and serve as a match for our federal grant. Mr. Kleppin made a motion to approve the application submission to IDoA. Ms. Randklev seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Ms. Newell shared with the board that this month has been evaluation month. She has been on site to attend the classrooms of approximately half of the program's volunteers, with half yet to go.

This month the Foster Grandparent program celebrated Volunteer Appreciation Day. On April 20, Foster Grandparents were surprised with boxes of candy from a local store in Sterling and were pleased to be remembered. Some of our sites even brought in potluck lunches or handed out gift cards to celebrate our volunteers.

Assistant Coordinator, Jeffrey Newcomer, attended the Whiteside County Senior Center resource fair and made contact with several seniors in the area.

The program's April in-service included its popular taco bar. Volunteers heard from "Perspectives, the Employee Assistance Program TCOC uses for employees. They learned of the services provided and that this benefit is now available to our Foster Grandparents and their families. They also enjoyed a CPR demonstration. They received remote phone battery chargers and instructions on using them as a recognition gift for the month.

Early Head Start/Head Start Program, Rachael DeSpain

While the program remains understaffed, it has experienced some recent success. Seven new staff have been hired, and more than six candidates are currently in the initial stages of the hiring process. Members of the leadership team attended two job fairs during April. One at Sauk Valley Community College and the other hosted by the Princeton Chamber of Commerce. All job vacancies are posted on Indeed and the Agency website. Please share employment opportunities amongst your personal and professional acquaintances. Locating, interviewing, and hiring passionate and dedicated staff will have the most significant impact on program services.

Generating greater Program/Agency awareness and regaining control of the early childhood market is a primary focus of the program. Ms. DeSpain was excited to share that they and their CSBG partners have increased their presence at community events. She thanked Mr. Torres for sharing information he learned about a two-year early childhood education grant and Ms. Jacobs for sharing a community event with the program earlier this month. Board members are asked to share any events scheduled during the summer months.

The COLA and Quality Improvement Grants have been submitted and are awaiting approval. In addition, the required amendment to consider reducing the number of children and families served in the Head Start program was also submitted. The Board approved this action earlier in the year. They are awaiting approval, and once granted, final steps to solidify program services for Fiscal year 2024 will occur.

Ms. DeSpain reminded members that the program not only serves children from birth to 5 years of age but also serves expectant mothers. This is an excellent opportunity to provide prenatal and postpartum information, education, and services to the mother and her family. Once the baby is born, they can begin education and child development services. She asked members to encourage expectant mothers to contact the program about services.

In tonight's handouts, Ms. DeSpain provided a copy of the March 2023 Board Report, March and April 2023 Policy Council minutes, a copy of Information Memorandum ACF-IM-HS-23-01 (Lead), and the most updated enrollment status report for FY23 and FY24. Again, please encourage any interested candidates to visit the Agency website at www.tcohelps.org or call 1-800-323-5434. In conclusion, Ms. DeSpain 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's report was provided by Ms. Calkins.

The LIHEAP department has been busy with imminent and disconnected household applications. Numbers for emergency applications can reach upwards of sixty per day. Therefore, they have struggled to keep up and process the regular applications. The LIHWAP program has also been busy, and they will have no problem exhausting these funds.

The LIHEAP program ends on May 31, 2023 and the new year will begin October 1, 2023. Ms. Saenz may keep some employees past May 31 to help wrap things up, organize and store files, and prepare for the next program year.

Weatherization/Housing Program, Wayne Thompson

Mr. Thompson shared that the program continues to work on the 60-unit Multi-Family housing complex in Sterling, the Ster-Lynn Estates apartments. Clover Hills Appliance Center has delivered the new refrigerators, and TCOC inspection staff has inspected them. They have submitted a partial draw to the state for the refrigerators and have moved on to the HVAC Contractor's work. They are now installing the new highly efficient furnaces, water heaters, central air units, and ASHRAE fans. They are over 50% complete with those tasks, and TCOC staff inspected the completed work earlier this week. They will complete the rest of the units over the next few weeks. They will have the Architectural contractor start on the exterior lighting and complete the insulation and air sealing of the buildings once all the HVAC work is complete. In the meantime, the Weatherization Department continues to process and complete single-family homes for the 2023 Weatherization Program.

Mr. Thompson will attend the Illinois Association of Community Action Agencies (IACAA) Annual Conference May 1 – 2. He will be facilitating a Weatherization round table discussion to allow those new to the program to ask questions related to the procedures and operation of the program.

One of the program's Assessors has resigned, but they were able to rehire an Assessor that worked at the Agency in the past and has already received his TCP certification. We will be looking to hire additional staff over the next program year.

President/CEO's Report, Jill Calkins

The Board currently has one vacancy, Bureau County, Category B. The private sector can include representatives of social service organizations, educational institutions, businesses, industries, labor, religious entities, private community interest groups, etc. Per regulations, this vacancy must be filled by May 27, 2023. Ms. Calkins is in contact with someone who has shown interest and is waiting to receive additional information.

Ms. Calkins reminded the membership that June is the annual meeting of the Board of Directors. Board service awards will be given, officers elected, and other annual Board business, such as check signers, grant signatories, etc., will be on the agenda. The May handouts will include nomination forms to self-nominate and/or nominate another member for any officer positions. Ms. Calkins also informed

members that she is considering an in-person-only meeting for the July Meeting. This is the meeting that is generally held in Mendota. A light supper is provided, and the Board recognizes the scholarship winners. More to come.

All members received a copy of the Board By-Laws in tonight's handouts. Members were asked to review the By-Laws and bring any thoughts or questions to the May meeting. A Year-at-a-Glance, a Committee Roster, and Committee Charters were also provided to new Board Members.

Ms. Calkins, Ms. Watts, Ms. Vos, Ms. Newell, and Mr. Thompson will attend the Annual IACAA Conference in Springfield from April 30 – May 2.

Ms. Calkins informed members that May is designated as Community Action Month. In tonight's handouts, Ms. Calkins provided a "Proud Board Member of a Community Action Agency" poster for members to display. They will also be posting throughout the month on social media.

Old Business:

The scholarship winner recommendations from the Scholarship Committee for the 2023 Scholarships are included in tonight's Board packet. Ms. Calkins thanked Ms. Neuner, Ms. Johnson, Ms. Watters, Ms. Vargas, and Ms. Trumper for reading and scoring the applications. Ms. Calkins reviewed the information with the Board. A total of 24 scholarship applications were received. Of those 24, 20 were deemed eligible based on the criteria. The Agency tries to award at least one scholarship in each of the nine service area counties. The Agency received no scholarships from Marshall, Putnam, or Stark Counties. The recommended winners and eight alternates are listed on the handout. Ms. Calkins asked the board for action to approve the 2023 Tri-County Opportunities Council scholarship winners as recommended by the Scholarship Committee. Ms. McPerryman made a motion to approve the scholarship winners as recommended, and Mr. Kleppin seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Ms. Calkins also sought Board action to ratify the Executive Committee's approval to accept the offer of \$34,000 with buyer and seller splitting the closing cost for the purchase of the property at 507 W. 3rd Street, Sterling, IL 61071. Mr. Howes made a motion to accept the offer. Mr. Hockstadt seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

New Business:

Ms. Calkins informed members that the Biden Administration is declaring the end of the pandemic health emergency on May 11, 2023. Therefore the TCOC Wellness Policy will no longer be in effect. In addition, since the federal vaccine requirement was designed to curb the surge in coronavirus cases, hospitalizations, and deaths, she sought Board approval to end the T.C.O.C. COVID-19 Vaccine Policy that required employees to be vaccinated or acquire an approved exemption. Ms. Koehler made a motion to approve ending the COVID-19 Vaccine Policy, and Mr. Hochstadt seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Next Meeting:

The next Board meeting is scheduled for **Tuesday, May 23, 2023, at the Wesley United Methodist Church, 2200 16th Avenue, Sterling, IL., at 6:00 p.m.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:20 p.m.