

Tri-County Opportunities Council
Board of Directors Meeting
April 25, 2024

Chair Harmon called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. Mr. Harmon welcomed the new Whiteside County Category A Board Member, Denise Russell.

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)

Charlotte Balensiefen, Sue Britt, **Mary Cork, Bernene Dahl**, Kim Dahl, **David Ditzler**, Lynnae Garrett, **Al Harmon, Marcia Heuer, John Hockstadt, Tom Howes, Betty Johnson, Lisa Johnson**, Betsy Kinder, **Ron Kleppin**, Kenneth Krogulski, Michael McEmery, Inga Neuner, Ronald Preston, Juanita Randklev, Becky Rich, **Denise Russell, David Torres**, Jeanne Vargas, **Derek Whited**.

Members Absent:

Reed Akre, Susan Bursztynsky, Robin Camplain, BJ Holocker, Julie Jacobs, Brad Lindstrom, Ginny McPerryman, Linda Pennell, Marissa Trumper, Laura Watters, and Lorene Winfield.

Others Present:

Rachael DeSpain, Vanessa Hoffeditz, Brandi Newell, Tammy Saenz, Wayne Thompson, Neddie Watts.

Minutes:

The March 26, 2024 Board minutes were previously sent to all members for review. Ms. Lisa Johnson made a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. Betty Johnson seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion carried.

Financial Report:

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

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

Board action was sought to ratify the Executive Committee's approval on April 11, 2024, to accept the Agency's 2022 403 (B) Thrift Plan Financial Statements and ERISA-required Supplemental Schedule. Ms. Lisa Johnson made a motion to accept the Financial Statements and ERISA Supplemental Schedule. Ms. Charlotte Balensiefen seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Board action was also sought to ratify the Executive Committee's approval on April 11, 2014, to file the revised IRS 5500 Annual Return/Report of Employee Benefit Plan for TCOC's Thrift Plan for the year ending December 31, 2022. Ms. Lisa Johnson made a motion to approve the filing of the revised IRS 5500 Annual Return/Report. Mr. Howes seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

The ending book balance for March was (\$248,807.59). A balance of \$497,053.99 was owed on the line of credit to Sauk Valley Bank as of March 31, 2024. The cash flow has been challenging for the last few months as it is taking twice as long to receive cash requests from the state.

Ms. Kanzler requested a virtual meeting for the Audit/Finance Committee on May 9, 2024, at 2:00 p.m. to review and approve the Agency's Cost Allocation Plan. The agenda and document will be emailed to committee members the first week of May.

The Audit/Finance Committee will also meet at 5:00 p.m. on May 28, 2024, in Sterling to review and accept the draft copy of the audit from Sikich. A light supper will be provided. The draft version of the audit will be mailed with the May Board packets.

Program Reports:

Community Services Block Grant (CSBG): Neddie Watts

Ms. Watts sought Board action to ratify approval given by the Executive Committee on April 11, 2024, to increase the previously approved grant application for Rapid Rehousing from \$365,000 to \$500,000. This grant will be effective July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025. Ms. Randklev made a motion to approve the increase. Ms. Betty Johnson seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

She also explained that action was needed to apply for Bureau County United Way Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) funding to support the Bureau County Food Pantry. No specific dollar allocation is included in the application, as the Bureau County United Way Board allocates based on approved applicants. Ms. Vargas made a motion to approve the submission of an application to Bureau County United Way for EFSP funding. Ms. Betty Johnson seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Lastly, Ms. Watts sought Board approval to accept the CSBG grant modification for an additional \$48,362 from the 2023 carryover. Mr. Kleppin made a motion to accept the CSBG grant modification. Mr. Howes seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Ms. Watts reported that a back-to-back form with information from all grants was included in tonight's Board packets. 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 used to provide information to grant managers.

She indicated that Department of Human Services (DHS) Homeless Prevention Program funding has been exhausted. She explained that there is still plenty of other funding to help those who are literally homeless, living in a shelter, in a car, at a park, etc. She also moved some funds around in the Emergency & Transitional Housing Grant (Voucher Shelter) to support those unable to stay in a shelter.

Ms. Watts informed the Board that she has paused the STEP Program until she receives funds to modify the CSBG grant, hopefully within the next few months. She had initially allocated roughly \$21,000 to this program to support those wanting to obtain a certification to become employed and make a higher living wage. From January 1 through March 31, she has spent \$35,263 on CDL classes and still has two more to pay. CDLs cost approximately \$6,000 for each individual. She could continue to assist with these certifications, but that would pull additional funds allocated to other CSBG programs, such as home maintenance, transportation, food, personal hygiene/diapers, youth programs, or even supporting those affected by a disaster. Outreach Staff have been asked to start working closely with colleges to seek additional scholarships or grants that those interested in obtaining a certification can apply for and to work with the local Business Employment Skills Team (BEST) for funding options.

Ms. Watts reported on some great things happening at the Bureau County Food Pantry. In March, the pantry provided 100 Easter food baskets to households, a 20-household increase from last year. The baskets included items to make an Easter meal, including a ham. The Food Pantry is also facilitating the Box of Kindness program in partnership with Valley Fresh Harvest, which is an organized group of local farm producers and growers who sell organically, locally grown, and raised food items. These items include fresh vegetables, meat, cheese, eggs, dairy, etc. They are providing a Box of Kindness to food pantry patrons through a grant. The Food Pantry is the first pantry they are working with to pilot the program and work through the "kinks" as they plan to increase to other pantries in food deserts. This program benefits both the local growers and the pantry patrons. This program started at the end of March, and patrons will be signed up for a one-time-a-month distribution. The maximum number of boxes available is 50. Over the past two months, 74 households and 163 individuals have been served. Valley Fresh Harvest also provides products to the general public through their website, Fresh Harvest. Individuals who order online can pick up at multiple locations in Bureau County.

Finally, she informed the Board that the Food Pantry applied for a grant to the Rotary Club of Princeton and was chosen as one of this year's recipients of the Love Our Community Grant for \$1,000! The funds will support the Pantry's Bounty Full Bags Program so homeless individuals can receive food. Bags would be provided to the police, crisis workers in the community who encounter homeless individuals, and the Living Room in Princeton.

Foster Grandparents: Brandi Newell

Ms. Newell attended the American Society on Aging Conference in March, which focused on age-related education. The conference was informative and inspirational and provided opportunities to network with other AmeriCorps Senior professionals. She hopes to implement much of what she learned at this conference in future in-service trainings with FGP Volunteers.

The Foster Grandparent Program remains in recruitment mode with a plan to onboard new volunteers in early June. She asked members to please continue to send any interested parties to the Agency's website where they may initiate contact with the FGP program.

The program had their final regular in-service meeting of the school year on April 5. On May 15, the program will celebrate volunteers with the annual spring recognition banquet. Board members are

invited and encouraged to attend but were asked to let Ms. Newell know next week if they plan to attend so she has an accurate count of participants for the event.

At the final in-service, volunteers responded to the annual survey about the program. Typical questions have focused on what the program offered at in-service training. In addition, this year, they were asked about the impact of the program on their lives on a personal level. Results from that survey and information from the Surgeon General's report on loneliness and social isolation were included in tonight's handouts.

Early Head Start/Head Start Program: Rachael DeSpain

Staffing and enrollment issues continue. There are vacant positions in 7 of 9 counties. Online postings on Indeed and our agency website remain the primary tools for advertising employment opportunities. The Social Media Coordinator has increased the number of postings related to employment opportunities on Facebook, Instagram, and X (formally known as Twitter).

One Early Head Start and five Head Start classrooms are not operating. The inability to manage is directly related to staffing issues. Five Parent-Child Educator positions remain vacant for Mendota, LaSalle, Ogle, Rochelle, and Stark Counties.

Ms. DeSpain, along with Ms. Calkins, have amplified conversations focused on the program's current design, the options offered, and the present opportunities to apply for additional state-issued funding streams. Amanda Schommer, Data Quality Manager, Jill Calkins, CEO, and Rachael DeSpain, Program Director, have attended recent calls/webinars hosted by the Illinois Head Start Association and ISBE (Illinois State Board of Education.)

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. The program has filled both Recruiter and Event Coordinator positions. These employees will work closely with other Agency employees to ensure active engagement at events throughout all nine counties. They will also lead efforts to host Agency events throughout the service area. They would love to have anyone from the Board interested in participating in those events to let them know.

The five-year project period grant was approved on March 22, 2024. The program was awarded \$8,130,756.00 for the budget period of April 1, 2024, through March 31, 2025.

Visits with Representative Sorensen and State Representative Fritts were a huge success. They are confident that these connections will serve the children, families, and clients of our Community Action Agency well. A picture collage was provided in tonight's handouts.

Also included in tonight's handouts, were copies of the March 2024 Board Report, March 2024 Policy Council minutes, the March 2024 Budget Breakdown, the current Impasse Policy, the enrollment status report, and a register of vacant positions. Ms. DeSpain informed the membership that she will request

approval of the Impasse Policy at the May meeting. 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 provided a brief overview of the LIHEAP program. She shared information about the documents required to complete an application, disconnection status, emergency applications, poverty levels and the matrix, furnace applications, and the PIPP program.

Weatherization/Housing Program: Wayne Thompson

Mr. Thompson reported that the Weatherization Department is still moving along with the production of weatherization jobs. Their new contractor, CMM Construction, has attended the required HVAC and Architectural courses and is now completing work for the program.

Mr. Thompson has submitted the 2025 Weatherization Plan, all three Weatherization grant applications, and budgets to DCEO, the Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity. The applications were for the Department of Energy, the Department of Health & Human Services, and the State of Illinois grants, plus the DOE-BIL Modification grant, all of which were due April 5, 2024.

Mr. Thompson mentioned that the Weatherization Department continues using the comprehensive program component, Weatherization Plus, and Weatherization Ready funds. These additions to the program have allowed them to make repairs to homes that would otherwise be deferred. All situations are dealt with on a case-by-case basis, and any repairs over \$5,000 require bids and waiver approval from DCEO.

The program has completed the assessment process for the 70-unit multi-project, Victor Meadow Senior Apartments in Princeton. They received some very welcomed help from the tech-field staff from DCEO and the teachers and training staff from the Indoor Climate and Training Center (ICRT) at the University of Illinois, Champaign. As mentioned last month, they will use a different approach to complete these units. They will be the first project in Illinois to use the new Department of Energies Low Rise Multi-Unit Priority List Protocols. This process will save the Agency valuable time because they can do the calculations in-house. The Priority List consists of super-insulating the attics to R-60, basements to R-30, upgrading lighting, etc. They hope to start work within a couple of weeks.

They continue to work on preparing our rental units for tenants and have moved in three families since the last report.

President/CEO's Report: Jill Calkins

Ms. Calkins reported that they recently had two resignations, one from Mary Jo Credi, who represented LaSalle County Category B, and one from Bob Henkelman, who represented Bureau County Category B. In addition to those vacancies, the Lee County Category B seat is still vacant. Ms. Calkins is working with someone interested in the Lee County vacancy.

TCOC will have its second annual All-Staff Celebration/Training Event on May 3rd. Ms. Calkins thanked Ms. Trumper, Ms. McPerryman, and Ms. Lisa Johnson for their help choosing winners of the staff awards. They look forward to recognizing staff for years of service and other awards, doing activities to break down program silos, and sharing information across programs.

Ms. Calkins and several other staff members will attend the Annual IACAA Conference in Springfield from May 5 to 7.

She 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 position.

Old Business:

The Agency received 20 scholarship applications. The 15 students on tonight's Board packet handout submitted all required documentation. Ariana Heersink submitted some missing documentation late and was not reviewed and scored by the Scholarship Committee. She is listed as the last alternate. Ms. Calkins thanked Ms. Watters, Ms. Vargas, Ms. McPerryman, and Ms. Trumper for their time and energy spent reviewing the applications. Ms. Calkins aggregated all their scores and, based on those scores, provided the winner recommendation to the full Board. Recommended for a scholarship were the following: Kaylee Dowda, Rashida Martin, Jadah Shipley, Susan Sanchez, Jazzmyn DeFord, Sophia Pantoja, Janda Hicks, Collin Tran-Howland, Alexis Murphy, Hazel Nieves, Katie Hutchinson, and Tasha Selden. Alternates were Aaron Lorenz and Arianna Heersink. Crystal Crow was disqualified.

Ms. Calkins sought approval for the 2024 Tri-County Opportunities Council scholarship winners as recommended by the Board Scholarship Committee. Ms. Bernene Dahl made a motion to approve the Scholarship winners as presented. Mr. Kleppin seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Ms. Calkins will send award letters to all winners and alternates next week and invite them to the July Meeting, which will be held at the Mendota Civic Center. She reminded members that the July meeting would be an in-person meeting only.

New Business:

There was no new business at this time.

Next Meeting:

The next Board meeting is scheduled for **Tuesday, May 28, 2024, at the Wesley United Methodist Church, 2200 16th Avenue, Sterling, IL., at 6:00 p.m.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:06 p.m.