

**Tri-County Opportunities Council
Board of Directors Meeting
March 26, 2024**

Chair Harmon called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. Mr. Harmon welcomed the new Lee County Category A Board Member, Reed Akre.

The membership recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Ms. Jacobs, Board Secretary, 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;** Lynnae Garrett; **Al Harmon; Marcia Heuer; John Hockstadt; Julie Jacobs; Betty Johnson; Lisa Johnson;** Betsy Kinder; **Ron Kleppin;** Kenneth Krogulski; Brad Lindstrom; Michael McEmery; **Ginny McPerryman; Inga Neuner;** Linda Pennell; Ronald Preston; Juanita Randklev; **Becky Rich; Marissa Trumper; Jeanne Vargas;** Laura Watters; Derek Whited.

Members Absent:

Susan Bursztynsky; Mary Cork; Mary Jo Credi; Bob Henkelman; BJ Holocker; Tom Howes; David Torres; Lorene Winfield.

Others Present:

Rachael DeSpain; Dawn Kanzler; Tammy Saenz; Wayne Thompson; Jaime Vos; Neddie Watts.

Minutes:

The February 22, 2024 Board minutes were previously sent to all members for review. Ms. Randklev made a motion to approve the minutes. Mr. Krogulski seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion carried.

Financial Report:

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

Fiscal Report: Dawn Kanzler

Ms. Kanzler shared that the ending book balance for February was (\$42,005) and a balance of \$481,053.99 was owed on the line of credit to Sauk Valley Bank as of February 29, 2024.

She informed the membership that Allison, the receptionist in Rock Falls, would start calling all board members to remind them of the meeting from now on. Vanessa Hoffeditz will no longer be placing calls for the southern members.

The agency-wide audit has started. The draft copy of the audit will be mailed to board members the week of May 13. The Audit/Finance Committee Meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 28, 2024, at 5:00 pm in Sterling. Food will be provided.

Audit Committee members will receive a letter from Sikich explaining potential risks that can be found during an agency audit. This notification letter is a requirement from an Accounting Standard that was put in place in 2021.

The 403b retirement audit and revised Form 5500 should be completed in the next few weeks. Last Thursday, Ms. Kanzler received an email from the Department of Labor (DOL) to amend Form 5500 and attach the required accountant's opinion, financial statements, and any footnotes or required supplemental schedules as soon as possible. The Audit and Executive Committee will meet virtually in mid-April (tentatively April 11 at 2:00 p.m.) to review and accept the documents for filing with the DOL. CLA will conduct a PowerPoint presentation, and she will mail the documents to all members.

Among tonight's handouts are the engagement letters from Sikich. The green packet is for the 403b retirement audit, and the yellow packet is for the agency audit. It is thicker because it separates the Statement of Work into three categories: Financial Statements Audit, Uniform Guidance Compliance Audit, and 990 tax preparation.

Program Reports:

Community Services Block Grant (CSBG): Neddie Watts and Jaime Vos

Ms. Vos, the Grantee Compliance Coordinator, briefly reviewed the 2023 Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Plan in the March Board packets. This plan is a guide to the agency's equal opportunity objectives. It demonstrates how well the agency performed towards meeting its employment, board composition, client service, and outreach nondiscrimination objectives during the previous year. The plan also provides a blueprint for agency compliance with outreach accessibility, reasonable accommodations, and utilization of well-qualified minorities, women, persons with disabilities, and other protected-class individuals. She requested Board approval of the 2023 Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action (EO/AA) Plan. Ms. McPerryman made a motion to approve the plan. Mr. Kleppin seconded the motion. A roll call vote was called, and the motion carried.

Ms. Vos also provided an update involving the Risk Management Plan for 2024. Members had received the plan with previous handouts. The progress in completing targets was shared. The Agency Wide Risk Assessment was completed in September 2023.

Ms. Watts sought Board approval to apply for \$20,000 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 submitting an application for \$20,000. Ms. Lisa Johnson seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Ms. Watts also sought Board approval to apply for the Department of Human Services Rapid Rehousing Program for \$365,000. This program supports households experiencing homelessness with rental assistance and supportive services to maintain housing. Mr. Kleppin made a motion to approve the submission of an application for \$365,000. Ms. Neuner seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Lastly, Ms. Watts sought Board approval to apply for the 2025 Department of Human Services Homeless Prevention grant for \$306,186 to provide rent, deposit, and mortgage assistance to households experiencing an economic crisis. Ms. McPerryman made a motion to approve submitting an application for \$306,186. Mr. Kleppin seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

The Agency nominates a family for the Families of Distinction program run by the Illinois Association of Community Action (IACCA) each year. The program highlights the outstanding work of Community Action Agency staff by celebrating families and individuals who have overcome significant personal and social obstacles in their pursuit of self-sufficiency. This year, our Agency nominated the Medina household. Ms. Watts indicated that their story and pictures were included in the Board packets.

She shared a success story about a customer who was provided financial assistance and support to obtain a CDL in 2019. This customer is now a Plant Manager at a trucking company and is looking for drivers. She asked the Outreach Worker to refer customers who were either working on their CDL or recently obtained one her way for a job.

Ms. Watts and Ms. Vos attended training in Springfield regarding the Community Action Plan and Community Needs Assessment a week ago. During the training, OCA and IACAA presented a new template to use when completing these two required documents annually. The new template is designed so that all Community Action Agencies report on the same information and shows a unified document to share with funders and state and local government entities to show how agencies are addressing poverty and making an impact.

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

Ms. Newell is away this week at the "American Society on Aging Conference."

Ms. Newell reports that the Foster Grandparent Program remains in recruitment mode so that onboarding of new volunteers can begin in early June. Please send any interested parties to tcochelps.org. They may initiate contact with the FGP office from there.

The spring is shaping up to be a busy one. The program's last regular in-service of the school year occurs on April 5. They will celebrate the volunteers with a recognition banquet on May 15 in Sterling. If any board members would like to attend to help honor our Foster Grandparent Volunteers, please get in touch with Ms. Newell for more details.

Early Head Start/Head Start Program: Rachael DeSpain's report was given by Ms. Calkins

Program services continue. Understaffing remains an issue. There are vacant positions in all counties. Online postings on Indeed and the Agency website remain the primary tools used for advertising employment opportunities.

One Early Head Start and four Head Start classrooms are not operating. The inability to manage is directly related to staffing issues. Five Parent-Child Educator positions remain vacant (Mendota, LaSalle, Ogle, Rochelle, and Stark Counties). Two new Parent Child Educators have been hired. One will replace the current Whiteside County PCE, and the second will allow the program to serve children and families throughout the Bureau, Putnam, and Marshall Counties.

The Full Enrollment Initiative reiterates the importance of meeting and maintaining full enrollment. 73% of nationwide programs have been identified as under-enrolled and have entered the Full Enrollment Initiative since January 2023. Our program entered the FEI on January 30, 2023. The 12-month under-enrollment plan/period ended on February 4, 2024. With no contact from the Regional Office, we believe the three options/determinations reviewed with you last month remain true. We remain unaware of the result of not meeting full enrollment, but we expect to know more next month. Another issue we are facing is the likelihood of local school districts writing for Preschool for All (PFA) or Preschool for All Expansion (PFAE) grant funding and the impact that would have on the program.

Emphasis on locating, attending, and bringing awareness to Agency services during community events remains a focus. Ms. DeSpain asked members to continue to offer any information regarding upcoming community events in their area.

The five-year project period grant was submitted on December 22, 2023. All necessary information was uploaded or entered into the Head Start Enterprise System. Requests for minor adjustments or clarity were asked of the program in late February and early March. All such requests have been met, and the grant resubmitted. At this time, the program has not received the Notice of Award but expects it soon.

U.S. House of Representative Eric Sorensen will visit the program on Thursday, March 27, 2024, and State House of Representative Bradley Fritts will visit the Polo site on Tuesday, April 9, 2024.

Ms. DeSpain brought the members' attention to the School Readiness Outcome Report provided in tonight's handouts. The report demonstrates developmental growth for children from the Fall to the Spring. Skills in social-emotional development showed the least growth, and the most significant growth was seen in mathematics. Discussion followed.

In tonight's handouts, Ms. DeSpain provided a copy of the February 2024 Board Report, February 2024 Policy Council minutes, 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.

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

Ms. Saenz sought Board approval to submit a grant application to the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) for Health and Human Services (HHS) LIHEAP funding for \$2,773,308. Of that amount, \$2,385,045 is allocated to direct client assistance, \$221,865 is allocated for program support, and \$166,398 is allocated for administration. The funding period is from 10/01/2024 to 06/30/2026. The grant application is due on April 5, 2024. Mr. Kleppin made a motion to approve the submission of an application for \$2,773,308. Ms. Betty Johnson seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Ms. Saenz also sought Board approval to submit a grant application to the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) for State LIHEAP/PIPP funding for \$2,927,381. Of that amount, \$2,459,001 is allocated to direct client assistance, \$234,190 is allocated for program support, and \$234,190 is allocated for administration. The funding period is from 07/01/2024 to 06/30/2025. The grant application is due on April 5, 2024. Ms. Camplain made a motion to approve submitting an application for \$2,927,381. Ms. Lisa Johnson seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

The LIHEAP department is finally caught up with LIHEAP applications. The downfall is that due to the Com Ed issue, 424 applicants that have Com Ed can't be processed at this time. Ms. Saenz has been in contact with ComEd, and they are hoping to be ready to go next week. ComEd also assured her they will not be beginning disconnects on April 1, 2024, due to the issue. They have nine homes on a waiting list for furnaces. She is awaiting four furnace invoices so that she can determine where she is at with funding. She hopes the Liheap program will go through until August 15, but funds may run out before then. She will keep the Board updated.

Weatherization/Housing Program: Wayne Thompson

Mr. Thompson reported that the Weatherization Department is moving along with the production of weatherization jobs. They had a few ups and downs with contractors to start the program but are getting things smoothed out now. They just hired a new contractor this past month, CMM Construction. They are in the process of attending the required HVAC and Architectural courses.

Mr. Thompson sought Board approval to submit a grant application for a Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), Department of Energy (DOE) Grant for \$518,784, of which \$48,429 is for Training & Technical Assistance, \$38,909 is for Administration, and the remaining \$431,446 is the base allocation for Materials/Labor and Health & Safety items directly installed in homes. They have divided this base allocation and allocated \$379,203 for the regular DOE grant and the other \$52,243 for the DOE Readiness Funding. The grant application is due on April 5, 2024. Mr. Hockstadt made a motion to approve the submission of an application for \$518,784. Mr. Kleppin seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Board approval was sought for submission of a grant application for a Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), Health & Human Services (HHS) Grant for \$640,675, of which \$422,233 is for Material/Labor and Health & Safety items directly installed in homes, \$147,781 is for Program

Support, \$38,441 is for Administration, \$32,220 is for Training & Technical Assistance. The grant application is due on April 5, 2024. Ms. Betty Johnson made a motion to approve submitting an application for \$640,675. Ms. McPerryman seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Mr. Thompson next sought Board approval to submit a grant application for a Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), State of Illinois Grant for \$320,239, of which \$218,237 is for Material/Labor and Health& Safety items directly installed in homes, \$76,383 is for Program Support and \$25,619 is for Administration. The grant application is due on April 5, 2024. Ms. Vargas made a motion to approve submitting an application for \$320,239. Ms. Lisa Johnson seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Lastly, Mr. Thompson sought Board approval to remove two out of three of our rental units from the Rental Housing Support Program (RHSP) when the current contracts expire on June 30, 2024. Mr. Kleppin made a motion to approve the removal of the two rental units from the RHS program. Ms. McPerryman seconded the motion. Discussion followed. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

An update was provided regarding the more comprehensive program component, Weatherization Plus, and Weatherization Ready funds. They have completed a few homes using some of these comprehensive upgrades and will report more in future months.

The Weatherization Department is also gathering the information to complete the 70-unit multi-project Victor Meadow Senior Living apartments in Princeton. They have submitted the initial paperwork to the Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunities Office of Energy Assistance and have received permission to proceed. Just today, they visited to gather the HVAC information so contractors could start placing orders. They will be using a different approach to complete these units. DCEO has stated that this will be the first project in Illinois to use the new Department of Energy Low Rise Multi-Unit Priority List Protocols. This process will save the agency valuable time because the calculations can be done in-house. The Priority List consists of super-insulating the attics to R-60, basements to R-30, upgrading lighting, etc. Mr. Thompson will keep the Board posted as they make progress.

They continue to work on preparing the rental units for tenants and are very close to completing another unit in the Sterling Tri-Plex on 6th Ave. It should be ready by next week.

President/CEO's Report: Jill Calkins' report was provided by Ms. Kanzler

The board has two vacancies, Whiteside County Category A and Lee County Category B. Ms. Calkins shared that she has been working with the Whiteside County Board Chair, and Denise Russell will be appointed to fill that vacancy. She also has another prospect for the Lee County vacancy. For Lee County, we are looking for someone with fiscal management and accounting background and expertise to meet the HS regulation.

The Agency received 20 scholarship applications. 13 have submitted all necessary documentation, 4 have missing documentation, two are attending out-of-state universities, and one was over the income

guidelines. The Scholarship Committee will read and score all scholarship applications and recommend winners to the full Board for approval based on the scoring system. Laura Watters, Jeanne Vargas, Ginny McPerryman, and Marissa Trumper have volunteered to serve on the Scholarship Committee. Ms. Calkins will work with them to get the applications reviewed and scored in April so that winners can be recommended at the April Board Meeting.

TCOC will be having its second annual All-Staff Celebration Event on May 3rd. During that event, they will be presenting staff awards. Nominees will be nominated by their peers for awards such as the Rookie Rockstar, Prime Player, Customer Whisperer, Helping Hands, Distributor of Smiles, etc. Ms. Calkins requested volunteers to pick the winner from those nominated. This would be done in mid-April. Ms. McPerryman, Ms. Lisa Johnson, and Ms. Trumper volunteered to review nominations and select winners for the awards.

New Business:

There was no new business at this time.

Next Meeting:

The next Board meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, April 25, 2024, at the Bureau County Metro Center, 837 Park Avenue West, Princeton, IL 61356**

The meeting adjourned at 7:18 p.m.