

**Tri-County Opportunities Council
Board of Directors Meeting
July 23, 2024**

Chair Harmon called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

The membership recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

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

Members Present: (In-person event only)

Susan Bursztynsky, Robin Camplain, Bernene Dahl, Kim Dahl, Stephanie Foes, Al Harmon, Marcia Heuer, John Hockstadt, Julie Jacobs, Betty Johnson, Lisa Johnson, Kristy Jones, Kenneth Krogulski, Ginny McPerryman, Inga Neuner, Ronald Preston, Denise Russell, David Torres, Jeanne Vargas and Laura Watters,

Members Absent:

Reed Akre, Charlotte Balensiefen, Sue Britt, Mary Cork, David Ditzler, Lynnae Garrett, BJ Holocker, Tom Howes, Betsy Kinder, Ron Kleppin, Brad Lindstrom, Sonjia martin, Linda Pennell, Michael McEmery, Juanita Randklev, Becky Rich, Marissa Trumper, and Derek Whited.

Others Present:

Rachael DeSpain, Dawn Kanzler, Brandi Newell, Tammy Saenz, Wayne Thompson, Jaime Vos, and Neddie Watts.

Scholarship Winners/Family Members Present:

Hazel Nieves, Collin Tran-Howland, Alexis Murphy, Kaylee Dowda, Katie Hutchison and Tasha Selden.

Presentation of 2024 Scholarship Winners:

Ms. Watts congratulated the 2024 Tri-County Opportunities Council Scholarship winners and presented each with a certificate. Pictures of the winners in attendance were taken and will be sent to local newspapers.

Minutes:

The June 27, 2024 Board minutes were previously sent to all members for review. Ms. Lisa Johnson made a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. Vargas seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Financial Report:

The May 2024 Financial Reports were provided to the membership for review prior to tonight's meeting. Ms. Betty Johnson made a motion to accept the May 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

Ms. Kanzler explained that she was out of the office this month except for three days due to a family death. She said she would mail the June financial statements soon so they have time to review them before approving them at the August meeting.

Program Reports:

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

Ms. Watts sought Board action to apply for the 2025 CSBG grant in the amount of \$ \$821,287. These funds would provide various programs to encourage customer engagement and move individuals toward self-sufficiency. Ms. Lisa Johnson made a motion to approve the submission of the CSBG grant application. Ms. Vargas seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Ms. Watts reported that the board packets included a copy of a letter to the program's CSBG Grant Manager that explained the services provided for each CSBG Work Program from January through the end of June. A back-to-back form with information from all grants was also included in the packets. Each report indicates the amount 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 also stated that she included some information regarding the traffic from the Agency's website and Facebook page. Google provides the information once every three months, identifying what people are asking, the demographics of those seeking information, and what is being typed into the search engine on Google to find the Agency. She indicated that the Facebook page offers information on posts being seen, liked, or shared.

She was happy to report that the housing grant contracts are coming in record time this funding year. Staff can now assist households at risk of becoming homeless or unable to stay in a shelter. Additional funding should be available by the end of the month. This is great news because these funds have been depleted since April, creating hardship for many struggling households.

Finally, she thanked the Planning/Evaluation Committee members who could attend the two meetings to discuss the client needs assessment survey and help update and develop new CSBG work programs for the 2025 grant beginning in January. She indicated the information would be provided to the Board during the August meeting.

Ms. Vos, the Grantee Compliance Coordinator, shared and discussed the Agency's newly drafted Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement. She then sought Board Action to approve it. Ms. Kim Dahl made a motion to approve the DEI statement. Ms. Camplain seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Ms. Vos also provided an update involving the 2nd Annual Charity Softball Tournament and Family Picnic.

Foster Grandparents: Brandi Newell

Ms. Newell traveled to Springfield in late July to participate in the Central Illinois Volunteer Conference. Assistant Coordinator Jeffrey Newcomer and Agency Assistant Bree Piatt also attended. The conference is a great chance to pick up new information and make networking connections with others in Illinois.

Ms. Newell and Mr. Newcomer will travel to Baltimore next week to attend the AmeriCorps Seniors Convening.

This program year is the first since the COVID pandemic that they have been able to expend their funds. A smaller volunteer count requirement, combined with a higher stipend rate, inflation, and stagnant funding, are responsible. Going forward, they hope the latter two issues will improve.

Of the fourteen new applications accepted by the FGP office, eight new volunteers have followed through and qualified for participation in the program. We look forward to welcoming those eight individuals to orientation in August. Anyone wanting to participate as a volunteer in the 2024-2025 school year who has not yet applied should submit an application immediately for consideration. The eight new volunteers should offset this year's retirees and offer a net gain of two volunteers to start the school year.

Early Head Start/Head Start Program: Rachael DeSpain

Ms. DeSpain shared that full-year program services continue, but staffing shortages prevent the program from offering all full-day, full-year options. Only one of three full-day, full-year Head Start classrooms, three of four Early Head Start Center Base classrooms, and five of ten Early Head Start Home Base options are operating. 7 of 9 counties have vacant positions. Online postings on Indeed and our agency website remain the primary tools for advertising employment opportunities.

Hiring efforts continue, enrollment pop-up events are being held, and program-specific social media posts are getting anywhere from 28 to 166 shares. Tonight's packet includes a handout showing the program-specific social media pages. She asked members to join their social media family and share relevant information!

On Monday, July 22, 2024, the DCFS Licensing Representative visited the Streator Center to view and ensure standards were met in the second Early Head Start Center Base classroom. They are working on locating, interviewing, and hiring staff for this option.

On June 27, 2024, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) issued an Information Memorandum centered around the FY2025 Monitoring protocol. Five days later, the program received a formal notice from the Administration for Children and Families confirming that it would receive a Focus Area 1 (FA1) review. The letter states that the agency will receive additional information regarding the review, including but not limited to the review lead and review dates 45 days before the event.

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. If anyone from the Board is interested in participating in those events, please let them know.

In tonight's handouts, Ms. DeSpain provided copies of the June 2024 Board Report, June 2024 Policy Council Minutes, Focus Area 1 letter, enrollment status report, Board specific non-federal figures, and social media listings. Any interested candidates should be encouraged 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 sought approval to accept the grant modification of an additional \$1,719,147 of 2024 funds. This will be the start-up money for the 2025 program year. The amount for program support is \$137,532, client assistance is \$1,478,466, and the administration portion is \$103,149. Supporting documents to process the grant modification were due July 10, 2024. Ms. Kim Dahl made a motion to accept the grant modification. Mr. Hockstadt seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Liheap has been very busy utilizing the list Com Ed sent for 809 customers who are eligible for reconnect assistance. The phone calls for assistance also keep coming in rapidly, with many calls made by people who have not applied this year. The PIPP program has been busy with re-certifications. Ms. Kanzler, Ms. Calkins, and Ms. Saenz will review budgets in the first week of August to determine funding availability. The LIHEAP program year will end on August 15, and all applications must be denied or approved by August 28. Please encourage anyone needing energy assistance to call the main office at 1-800-323-5434.

The staff has been attending webinars regarding the Solar for All program and the Utility Low-Income Discount Rates. At this time, the discount rates pertain to Nicor and Ameren gas only. A representative from IACAA will attend the August board meeting to provide training on the low-income discount rates.

Weatherization/Housing Program: Wayne Thompson

Mr. Thompson reported that the 2024 Weatherization Program is winding down, and the DOE portion is complete as of 06/30/2024. They will work on this grant's closeout process over the next couple of weeks. It must be submitted to DCEO (Dept of Commerce & Economic Opportunity) before August 14. The State and HHS (Health & Human Services) grants will have any remaining funds rolled over and extended until the end of September. They project that they will expend all grant funds before that date and submit those closeout packages before November 14. They have already received the approved HHS and State grants for 2025, so there will be a seamless transition regarding budgets.

Thus far, they have completed two of ten buildings containing twelve rental units at the Victor Meadows Senior Living Apartments in Princeton, and the tenants couldn't be happier. They received new furnaces, central air conditioners, water heaters, refrigerators, LED lighting, R-60 attic insulation, low-flow showers, sink aerators, etc. These items are all Energy Star-rated and, in most cases, well above the efficiencies required to be Energy Star-rated items. These customers will undoubtedly see substantial savings on energy bills and increased comfort.

Our agency was chosen by the federal offices of the Department of Energy for a review of our 2024 Weatherization Assistance Program. They were on site Monday and Tuesday of last week. The review contained everything from the Agency/Weatherization Program Procurement processes, staff training certifications and licenses, insurances, and all procedures from start to finish while doing homes. This was also done for all Weatherization contracting businesses and their staff. Again, they checked for valid training certifications, licensing, insurances etc. They had representatives from DCEO, Mr. Thompson, Ms. Kanzler, and Ms. Calkins in attendance for the file review portion of the visit. They also went into the field to visit clients' homes to see how the funds were being spent, monitor the DCEO Tech Teams as they rated all work done, and look for any issues with workmanship or misappropriated funds. During this process, Mr. Thompson and two of his inspection staff accompanied the DCEO staff and the DOE field monitor. They will receive a full report sometime in the future, but the management and field staff from DCEO gave a positive review upon their exit.

Lastly, they have been working on setting up the new Weatherization system for applications and work orders.

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

Ms. Calkins reported that Sonjia Martin from A Servant's Heart in Ottawa recently filled the LaSalle County Category B vacancy. She is not in attendance tonight.

Ms. Calkins is working on getting the annual Board self-evaluation out to members in August. She is designing an online survey and will provide the link. If members desire a printed copy, they can let her know, and she will provide them a copy along with a self-addressed stamped envelope. She reminded the membership that this is an important process in ensuring that the Board is fulfilling their duties and responsibilities and that appropriate processes are in place to ensure that the Board is giving due diligence to planning and oversight over the organization. Essentially, no one directly oversees the board, so it's vital that they take an annual objective look at themselves as individual directors and how they function as a group. She asks that members be on the lookout for this in August and to please take the time to complete the survey.

As Tammy stated in her report, someone from the Illinois Association for Community Action Agencies will attend our August meeting to train the Board on the Low-Income Discount Rates. The Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) has required Ameren and Nicor to provide customers with these discounts.

Customers will begin seeing these discounts starting October 2024. Eligibility is determined through the LIHEAP application process.

Old Business:

There was no old business at this time.

New Business:

There was no old business at this time.

Next Meeting:

The next Board meeting is scheduled for Thursday, August 22, 2024, at the Bureau County Metro Center, 837 Park Avenue West, Princeton, IL 61356, at 6:00 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at 7:16 p.m.