

**Tri-County Opportunities Council
Board of Directors Meeting
October 26, 2023**

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m. by Chair Harmon.

The membership recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

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

Members Present: (Virtual ONLY Meeting)

Sue Britt; Bernene Dahl; David Ditzler; Al Harmon; John Hockstadt; Betty Johnson; Lisa Johnson; Betsy Kinder; Kenneth Krogulski; Brad Lindstrom; Michael McEmery; Ronald Preston; Juanita Randklev; Angela Shippert; David Torres; Marissa Trumper; Jeanne Vargas; Derek Whited.

Members Absent:

Charlotte Balensiefen; Karla Belzer; Susan Bursztynsky; Robin Camplain; Mary Cork; Mary Jo Credi; Kim Dahl; Bob Henkelman; Marcia Heuer; BJ Holocker; Tom Howes; Julie Jacobs; Don Koehler; Donna Koehler; Ron Kleppin; Ginny McPerryman; Inga Neuner; Linda Pennell; Laura Watters; Lorene Winfield.

Others Present:

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

Minutes:

The September 26, 2023 Board minutes were previously sent to all members for review. Mr. Hockstadt made a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. Randklev seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion carried.

Financial Report:

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

Fiscal Report: Dawn Kanzler

Ms. Kanzler sought Board action to accept the MetLife renewal rates for dental, vision, and life insurance effective January 1, 2024. Ms. Lisa Johnson made a motion to accept the renewal rates, and Ms. Randklev seconded the motion. Ms. Kanzler shared that it was a 6% increase. Vision costs remain the same; life insurance has an increase of \$.77/mo., and dental insurance has an increase of \$1.07/paycheck. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

The ending book balance for September was (\$24,378.26), and a balance of \$494,209 was owed on the line of credit to Sauk Valley Bank as of September 30, 2023.

CLA prepared the Agency's 2022 403(b) Thrift Plan's Form 5500 with the information they had, and Ms. Kanzler signed and submitted it to the DOL on Thursday, October 13, 2023. An amended 5500 will be completed before the end of November. A virtual meeting with the Audit/Finance Committee will be scheduled once the documents have been revised. Ms. Kanzler will mail the documents to the members.

Ms. Kanzler sent out the Request for Proposals (RFP) for the agency and retirement audits for calendar year 2023. The Audit/Finance Committee will meet at the Rock Falls office on November 21, 2023, at 10:00 a.m. to review and score the RFPs. TCOC will provide lunch.

Program Reports:

Community Services Block Grant (CSBG): Neddie Watts

Ms. Watts sought Board approval to apply for the Church Women of United Grant to support the Bureau County Food Pantry to offset rent, utility expenses, and additional food. Ms. Randklev made a motion to approve the submission of the application for the Church Women of United Grant. Ms. Vargas seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Ms. Watts brought the members' attention to the CSBG and Housing Quarterly Report included in tonight's handouts. She explained that the dates listed under each title are the grant's beginning date to the current quarter for that particular grant. The CSBG Grant is in its 3rd quarter, and the rest are in their 1st quarter. Ms. Watts pointed out that the new grant, DHS Rapid Rehousing, recently had its contract signed and staff trained earlier this month. That is the reason why no households are being served yet.

Also in tonight's handouts was an All Characteristics Report showing data from the beginning of the CSBG Grant, January 1, 2023, through September 30, 2023. The report shows demographic information collected for every CSBG application completed and entered into STARS. She plans on providing this report quarterly to the Board. In the report, she noted the following:

- Individuals reported - 1,798
 - Out of these numbers:
 - 127 do not have a high school diploma
 - 246 have a disabling condition
 - 1,655 have health insurance
 - 22 are Veterans
 - 247 are employed full-time
 - 134 are employed part-time
 - 255 are unemployed and not in the labor force (including those who are disabled and unable to work).

- Households reports – 834
 - Out of these numbers:
 - 112 own their home
 - 521 are renting

- 168 were homeless
- 126 would be over guidelines if the CSBG Income Guidelines go back to 125% (it is now at 200%)
- 313 have income from employment only
- 261 have income from employment and non-cash benefits
- 222 have income from other income sources and non-cash benefits
 - Non-Cash Benefits:
 - WIC – 1 (for some reason, STARS only counts one household for this report each year – she stated that she had reported the issue many times.)

She also shared that she had joined a Homeless Coalition with many stakeholders in Whiteside County as part of the Whiteside County Healthier Partnership. The goal is to look into opening another homeless shelter within the county to support those asked to leave the shelter in the mornings or who cannot stay due to the current shelter rules and regulations. She looks forward to being an active and resourceful partner who can provide data and program information to help those facing homelessness.

Foster Grandparents: Brandi Newell

Ms. Newell reported that the program remains strong this fall. The volunteer count has decreased by one more, leaving fifty Foster Grandparents in October. This number is still two more than what the grant requires. Office staff will continue to monitor stipend expenditures to determine if additional volunteer recruitment is needed for the spring semester.

The school year seems to be flying by. Foster Grandparents enjoyed their October 6th in-service. Sterling PD therapy dog Brinkley, visited them. They learned about the amazing work that Brinkley does not only in Sterling but in surrounding areas as well. They also learned that Brinkley is due to retire next spring, so the timing in scheduling her was fortunate. Volunteers also enjoyed their Zoom Q&A with Greg Forbes Siegman, author of “The First Thirty.”

Board members received information in their board packets about designating the TCOC Foster Grandparent Program as the recipient of credits from their Kroger Community Rewards accounts. If members shop at a Kroger Grocery Store, she asked them to please consider naming the FGP program as a beneficiary. Kroger then donates a percentage of the consumer’s shopping dollars to the FGP program every time they spend money there, and it doesn’t affect the consumer's rewards. The donations have traditionally added up to approximately \$200 annually. If members would like additional flyers to share, please let Ms. Newell know.

Early Head Start/Head Start Program: Rachael DeSpain

Ms. DeSpain thanked Mr. Harmon and Mr. Krogulski for participating in the program’s Policy Council Meetings.

The program remains understaffed and, therefore, under-enrolled. Currently, there are around 15 applicants in the hiring process; this number changes often and at times quickly. Currently, there are vacant positions in all counties.

All but one Early Head Start and three Head Start classrooms are operating. The program recently hired two employees of the Oregon Head Start site. Once one more is secured, they will plan to provide in-person services. Four Parent-Child Educator positions remain vacant. (BPM, Mendota, LaSalle (1), and Stark Counties). A Parent-Child Educator for LaSalle County has been hired. Once trained, they will provide in-person weekly home visits to families on the waitlist.

Emphasis on locating, attending, and bringing awareness to Agency services during community events remains a focus. Please continue to offer any information regarding upcoming community events in your area.

The request to reduce the total number of Head Start slots remains undecided. As per Office of Head Start (OHS) guidance, the program approaches recruitment and hiring efforts as if the request has been approved. Directives regarding the Grant due on or before December 31, 2023, have been requested. In addition, the program will be asking for Board approval to request a non-federal waiver and write the next five-year project period grant during November's meeting.

In tonight's handouts, Ms. DeSpain provided a copy of the September 2023 Board Report, the 2022-2023 Annual Report, a copy of the COLA and QI Notice of Award, a letter from the Administration for Children and Families regarding the next grant application, the enrollment status report, and a register of vacant positions throughout the program.

Please encourage interested candidates to visit the Agency website at www.tcochelps.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

Ms. Saenz shared that the LIHEAP program has begun and has been extremely busy the last three weeks. The phones have been ringing off the hook in all nine county intake offices. If members hear that someone is having difficulty getting through to an office, it is because the phones are busy. If they leave a message, someone will return their call in a timely manner.

They were able to pend applications starting on September 18, 2023 and have entered 2,830 applications. They are also doing auto enrolls for the elderly and disabled. As long as there have been no changes to the household, they only have to send in their current income. Ms. Saenz has also completed 18 furnaces to date, doing three or four per week since the program started.

She is unsure if going back to priority periods has helped or not...more on that at the November board meeting.

Weatherization/Housing Program: Wayne Thompson

Mr. Thompson reported that the Weatherization Dept. is finalizing the cost for the 2024 Weatherization catalogs. As mentioned last month, they must hold a Cost Negotiation Meeting with any contractor that wants to negotiate costs. They did have one contractor who requested to negotiate on four items. They considered their request, submitted them to DCEO, and were able to update the cost on three of four of the items requested. The contractor was pleased and agreed to accept all costs as adjusted.

Mr. Thompson also stated they were busy working on the 2024 Monitoring Tool required by DCEO. This is a program-wide monitoring that is completed by answering a series of questions and uploading supporting documents. This requires tremendous time and effort but is a mandatory function. It requires them to submit all updated contractor and agency information such as insurance, training, catalogs, etc.

They will also be finalizing and submitting the Reconciliation/Closeout Packages for the 2023 HHS and State of Illinois budgets over the next couple of weeks.

Also, as mentioned last month, the Weatherization Dept. will begin rolling out a more comprehensive program component called Weatherization Plus and Weatherization Ready funds this year. These additions to the program allow repairs to homes that would otherwise be deferred or denied due to roof leaks, plumbing or electrical issues, etc. He emphasized the fact that this is not rehabilitation, and the program does have its limits. For example, they can replace bad wiring in the attic, allowing them to insulate or replace leaking pipes and drains to complete a crawlspace or install a furnace in the basement. All situations will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, and any repairs over \$5,000 require bids and waiver approval from DCEO. They have a couple of homes already assessed to receive some of these comprehensive upgrades and will report in future months.

They have eight of our required Ten desk audits approved by DCEO (Dept. of Commerce and Economic Opportunity) and will submit the remaining two within the next couple of weeks.

Lastly, he reported that the maintenance person has completed yet another rental unit in Sterling, and tenants are currently being screened to get that unit rented out. Next, he will begin working on the duplex in Dixon. They are hoping to have it ready to rent by mid-October

President/CEO's Report: Jill Calkins

Ms. Calkins thanked the leadership team for all the hard work that they do daily and their dedication to serving our communities. She also thanked the Board for the flexibility in having this meeting virtually due to her recent return from family medical leave.

The Board remains with one vacancy, LaSalle County, Category C. Ms. Calkins requested and received approval for a 90-day extension to fill this vacancy. She reminded members that she has information handouts that can be shared if they know of anyone who may be interested.

Ms. Calkins expressed that it is hard to believe it is that time of the year again, but the Personnel Committee will be meeting to take care of a few personnel items prior to the November meeting. Three meeting dates are on the schedule for November to address any changes needed to the Human Resource Policy and Procedures Manual, complete the President/CEO appraisal, and update the Salary/Wage Classification by Position document.

Ms. Calkins informed members that a federal government shutdown after November 17 is possible. Like the last Federal Budget deadline of September 30, she explained that the Agency's normal operations will not change in response to a short-term government shutdown. They will continue to operate the programs and carry out our mission. Staff will continue to receive their pay and benefits, and they will continue to assist customers.

Since the Board will not meet again until November 28, Ms. Calkins wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving.

Old Business:

There was no old business at this time.

New Business:

There was no new business at this time.

Next Meeting:

The next Board meeting is scheduled for **Tuesday, November 28, 2023, at the Wesley United Methodist Church, 2200 16th Avenue, Sterling, IL., at 6:00 p.m.**

The meeting adjourned at 6:58 p.m.