

**Tri-County Opportunities Council  
Board of Directors Meeting  
February 27, 2025**

Chair Harmon called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

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)

Reed Akre, Charlotte Balensiefen, **Ali Braboy**, Sue Britt, Robin Camplain, Bernene Dahl, Kim Dahl, **David Ditzler**, Stephanie Foes, Lynnae Garrett, **Al Harmon**, **Darlene Hartmann**, Marcia Heuer, **John Hockstadt**, BJ Holocker, Tom Howes, **Betty Johnson**, **Lisa Johnson**, Kristy Jones, Betsy Kinder, **Ron Kleppin**, Inga Neuner, Linda Pennell, Ronald Preston, Juanita Randklev, Becky Rich, **David Torres**, Marissa Trumper, Jeanne Vargas, and **Derek Whited**.

**Members Absent:**

Susan Bursztynsky, Mary Cork, Julie Jacobs, Kenneth Krogulski, Brad Lindstrom, Ginny McPerryman, and Laura Watters.

**Others Present:**

Jill Calkins, Rachael DeSpain, Vanessa Hoffeditz, Dawn Kanzler, Tammy Saenz, Wayne Thompson, and Neddie Watts.

**Minutes:**

The January 28, 2025, Board Minutes were previously sent to all members for review. Mr. Hockstadt made a motion to approve the minutes, which Mr. Kleppin seconded. A roll call vote was called, and the motion carried.

**Financial Report:**

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

**Fiscal Report:** Dawn Kanzler

Ms. Kanzler reviewed the Agency-Wide Annual Budget included in tonight's Board packet. Discussion followed. Board action was sought to accept the 2025 Agency-Wide Budget as presented. Ms. Vargas made a motion to accept the 2025 Agency-Wide Annual Budget, and Mr. Kleppin seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

She provided a brief review on reading and understanding the monthly financial statement packet. Discussion followed, and questions were answered. She shared that the January ending book balance

was \$41,398.96. As of January 31, 2024, a balance of \$585,598 was owed on the line of credit to Sauk Valley Bank.

Sikich will conduct the agency-wide audit, beginning on March 10, 2025, and concluding on April 11, 2025. She informed the membership that a representative from Sikich may contact a few audit committee members for a fraud interview during this period.

#### **Program Reports:**

##### **Community Services Block Grant (CSBG): Neddie Watts**

Ms. Watts informed the Board that their packets included a report of the persons served during each program's grant period. She indicated that the CSBG report was for the 2024 grant year, while the other programs began in July 2024 and will end in June 2025.

She excitedly informed the Board about a new initiative she is beginning: a 100-day Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness in Whiteside County. The Continuum of Care Chairperson approached her about an organization called the RE!NSTITUTE, who was looking for a county to work with, along with DuPage and Sangamon, to end veteran homelessness.

RE!NSTITUTE is an international nonprofit organization that works collaboratively with local systems and communities - supporting them to focus on effectively and equitably meeting the needs of the people they serve by bringing together local agencies and constituents to develop and achieve mutual goals within a specific timeframe and then build upon that success. She hosted an informational meeting on February 18 in the main office with community leaders, who developed a list of partners to send to Bloomington for a two-day launch workshop on developing the strategies for ending veteran homelessness in 100 days. The Continuum of Care Chairperson indicated that he participated in Mercer County's challenge in which they thought they had a handful of homeless veterans. However, during the challenge, they found 50! Ms. Brayboy shared her knowledge of a similar initiative, and Ms. Neuner shared her excitement about Sinnissippi's challenge participation.

Ms. Watts thanked the Board members who volunteered to review the Family of Distinction nominations and help score to pick the family to send to be recognized in May during IACAA's Family of Distinction banquet. She was happy to announce that this year's Family of Distinction nominee is Edward Dergance from LaSalle and shared his story.

##### **Foster Grandparents: Brandi Newell's report was given by Jill Calkins**

Ms. Newell reported that Foster Grandparent Volunteers reconvened in early February for the first in-service of 2025. Many who have been out with various treatments, surgeries, and hospitalizations are making their comebacks, and they could not be happier to have them ready to serve again at their various volunteer sites. At the February in-service, they learned about the importance of confidentiality in schools (FERPA) and had a presentation from Illinois Extension on "Finding Their Bounce" and the ability to rebound from setbacks.

The FGP office is busy budgeting for the 2025-2026 grant year. Additionally, AmeriCorps Seniors informed the office of a need to remove any DEI language from their current grant application. These changes had a tight window for completion and technical issues to circumvent, but they were able to submit the changes before the deadline. They hope this action helps to keep our funding secure.

The volunteer recognition banquet is scheduled for Tuesday, May 27. The luncheon will occur from approximately 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. in Sterling. Details will be set soon and shared with the Board. In the meantime, she encouraged members to pencil it in on their calendars. She is hopeful some members can help them celebrate their volunteers.

**Early Head Start/Head Start Program: Rachael DeSpain**

Ms. DeSpain reported that the Department of Children and Family Services has not provided any updates or investigation results regarding the child/staff incident.

On February 12, 2025, the program received a Program Performance Summary Report. The report you received copies of noted two deficiencies with a 30-day timeline for corrective action. A copy of this report is included in tonight's handouts.

- *Deficiency One: Safety Practices. "The grant recipient did not ensure all staff refrained from behaviors that had the potential to maltreat and endanger the health and safety of children."*
- *Deficiency Two: Systems for Program Management and Improvement. "The grant recipient had a child maltreatment incident on December 5, 2024; however, the recipient did not report the incident to the ACF Regional Office until December 23, 2024, 18 days later."*
  - *While the assistant teacher observed the incident, they did not immediately report it. A second incident occurred on December 18, 2024, and the assistant teacher then reported both incidents to the Department of Children and Family Services on December 20, 2024.*
  - *The recipient reported both incidents to the ACF Regional Office on December 23, 2024.*

On Thursday, February 13, 2025, Jill Calkins, Dawn Kanzler, and Jenine Patty-Anderson attended a phone call with the Program Specialist and Grantee Specialist to better understand the next steps regarding the two deficiencies. During the call, staff were encouraged to have the Board Chair request an extension to the 30-day timeline for corrective action. This was done and submitted on February 18, 2025. A response to the request has not yet been received.

She also reminded the membership that the focus area one review will occur the week of March 3, 2025. Albert Harmon, Board Chairperson, and Lynnae Garrett, Policy Council member, will participate in the Program Governance virtual call on Monday, March 3, 2025, from 10:00 to 10:30 a.m.

She noted that following the approval of the Board of Directors and Policy Council, the program continues to work on the Change in Scope Amendment.

She explained that emphasis on locating, attending, and bringing awareness to Agency services during community events remains a top priority. Members were encouraged to continue to offer any information regarding upcoming community events in their communities. They would love to have Board Members at these events and encourage anyone interested in participating to contact her or Neddie Watts.

In tonight's handouts, she provided copies of the January 2025 Policy Council minutes and Board Report, the letter from the Administration for Children and Families/Office of Head Start outlining the results of the RAN review on January 17, 2025, an Information Memorandum from ACF, an enrollment status reports, Board In-Kind report, and the non-federal in-kind donation sheet. 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 shared that the LIHEAP program applications are finally slowing down, which has given them a chance to catch up on processing applications. She encouraged members to continue to refer individuals/families in need of energy assistance. It has been a year since the program's issues with PIPP and Com Ed started, but the state expects all issues to be fixed by April 1, 2025. The furnace program has ended, and all invoices have been paid.

Ms. Saenz will attend two trainings in March: grant application workshops in Springfield and a three-day Basic Heat training class in Champaign. She is looking forward to learning new information.

**Weatherization/Housing Program: Wayne Thompson**

Mr. Thompson shared that they continue to work on the new Weatherization system (IWX) for weatherization applications, assessments, and work orders. They continue to have issues getting everything to work correctly, and it is getting better all the time. They continue to get jobs out, completed, and paid for after inspection. They will continue to train, attend the Bridge call meetings, and work with the system until it is mastered.

He reminded members that the application portal is now active and to please refer all potential customers to the agency website. Under the Weatherization tab, they will find a turquoise tab that says "Apply On-Line." Customers will go to that site and complete their Pre-Application. Once complete, it will be reviewed by the program's office staff. Once their application is deemed eligible and their priority number is approved, they will be prompted to complete the full application, and an assessment will be scheduled.

Mr. Thompson participated in the Virtual NICOR-COM-ED Braided Utility Kickoff meeting on February 11. The meeting was held to discuss the 2025 Braided Weatherization Program. This program is paid for by Nicor Gas and Commonwealth Edison and administered by Resource Innovations, which splits the cost of all Weatherization items installed in homes. This allows the program to achieve a much better

savings-to-investment (SIR) ratio, thus allowing them to do more in the homes. The utility programs pay the program support and administration fees to the agency at the exact percentages of the Weatherization Program.

He also attended an Ameren Illinois Braided Utility Kickoff meeting on February 20 in Springfield to discuss the Southern 2025 Braided Weatherization Program. This program is paid for by Ameren Illinois and administered by Walker Miller Energy, which splits the cost of most Weatherization items installed on homes. As with the Northern Utility Program, this allows the program to achieve a much better savings-to-investment (SIR) ratio, thus allowing them to do more in the homes. The Ameren Illinois utility program also pays the Program Support and Administration fees to the agency at the exact percentages as the Weatherization Program.

The maintenance person continues to work on readying apartment units for rent, which is progressing well on a few units. They should be ready for clients or families soon.

**President/CEO's Report: Jill Calkins**

Ms. Calkins shared that they continue to actively monitor the situation and work to understand the implications of the White House Executive Orders and the Administration's priorities. Fortunately, there have been no changes in our funding or services at this time. They have been asked to revise grant funding narratives to ensure they align and remove, if applicable, any language related to DEI activities.

They continue to be in close contact with funders and partners, who are also monitoring the situation closely. The priority remains ensuring the continuity of our services, supporting staff, and advocating for the individuals and families who rely on the services. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Ms. Calkins reports that the current Board vacancies are for Whiteside County, Category C; LaSalle County, Category B; and Carroll County, Category B. She has reached out to LSSi, Sinnissippi Centers, Pinnacle, Health Departments, Senior Centers, and other community partners.

Tonight's Board handouts include a packet with committee assignments and committee descriptions. Ms. Calkins reviewed the standing committees and encouraged anyone not on a committee to let her know if they are interested in joining. This is not mandatory. However, Ms. Calkins would like members to consider participating in at least one committee. She would like to have equal categorical representation across committees.

Tonight's handouts included the 2024 FACT sheets, which include agency-wide and county-specific data. Ms. Calkins encouraged members to review the information and informed them that they could share it with community members or organizations, such as county boards.

Also included in tonight's handouts were Strategic Goal Progress Reports from each of the four strategic goals. Ms. Calkins stressed that the reports provide an overview of progress on strategic goals, highlighting key achievements, challenges, milestones, and measurable outcomes. She again encouraged members to let her know if they are interested in joining any of the four committees working on these goals.

The 2025 Scholarship application was emailed out to members earlier this month. The Agency will be offering 12 scholarships again this year. The scholarship amount is \$1,250 for full-time students. Qualifying applicants must meet the income requirements and must be attending an Illinois institution of higher learning. The packet has been sent to all service area high school counselors, major state universities, and area community colleges. Press releases have also been sent to all service area newspapers, and the scholarship packet is available on the Agency's website. The deadline for all applications to be postmarked is March 14, 2025. Ms. Calkins asked the members to share with anyone they think may be interested and eligible. Two applications have been received.

**Old Business:**

There was no old business at this time.

**New Business:**

Ms. Braboy shared that Congress members have grant applications open for government agencies and nonprofits called Congressional Directed Spending requests every year. She wondered if Tri County would be interested in applying for this to supply newspaper subscriptions, digital or print, for residents in its service area. She will share more information as it becomes available.

**Next Meeting:**

The next Board meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 25, 2025, at the Wesley United Methodist Church, 2200 16th Avenue, Sterling, IL., at 6:00 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at 7:21 p.m.