

**Tri-County Opportunities Council  
Board of Directors Meeting  
September 24, 2024**

Chair Harmon called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

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, **Al Harmon, Marcia Heuer, John Hockstadt, Julie Jacobs,** Betty Johnson, Lisa Johnson, Kristy Jones, Betsy Kinder, **Ron Kleppin, Kenneth Krogulski,** Brad Lindstrom, Michael McEmery, **Ginny McPerryman,** Inga Neuner, Linda Pennell, Ronald Preston, Juanita Randklev, Becky Rich, **David Torres,** Jeanne Vargas, and Laura Watters.

**Members Absent:**

Susan Bursztynsky, Mary Cork, Kim Dahl, David Ditzler, Stephanie Foes, Lynnae Garrett, BJ Holocker, Tom Howes, Sonjia Martin, Denise Russell, Marissa Trumper, and Derek Whited.

**Others Present:**

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

**Minutes:**

The August 22, 2024, 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 July 2024 Financial Reports were provided to the membership for review prior to tonight's meeting. Ms. Balensiefen made a motion to accept the July 2024 Financial Reports and file them for audit. Ms. Lisa Johnson seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

**Fiscal Report:** Dawn Kanzler

Ms. Kanzler reported that money is finally flowing, and the August ending book balance was \$590,510.48. As of August 31, 2024, nothing was owed to Sauk Valley Bank on the line of credit.

Sikich is working on preparing the Agency's 2023 403(b) Thrift Plan's Financial Statements and IRS Form 5500, which has to be filed electronically by October 15, 2024. They still need to receive more documents from a few custodians before completing everything; therefore, there will be a virtual

Executive and Audit/Finance Committee Meeting on October 11, 2024, at 1:00 pm. The meeting should be about 30 minutes. The documents will be both emailed and mailed to each committee member.

**Program Reports:**

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

Ms. Watts informed the board that a PowerPoint handout was included in tonight's board handouts. The PowerPoint included information on the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) Program, how the Agency is funded, why being a part of the board is an essential piece of CSBG, eligibility, how programs are created, customer engagement, and partnering with community partners. Also included in the printout was information on the 2024 CSBG Work Programs and Housing Programs that the program offers. She encouraged the board to refer to the handout when encountering households seeking assistance.

Ms. Watts reported on behalf of Ms. Vos, the Grantee Compliance Coordinator, that each year, the Agency has to complete the CSBG Organizational Standards. The CSBG Organizational Standards are designed to characterize an effective and healthy organization while reflecting the vision and values of Community Action and the requirements of the CSBG Act. Everyone received a copy of the CSBG Monitoring Report in the board packets, which showed that the Agency was compliant in all areas.

Ms. Watts also reported, on behalf of Ms. Vos, the Grantee Compliance Coordinator, that the 2nd Annual Charity Softball Tournament and Family Picnic will be held on September 28th at Centennial Park in Rock Falls. There will be a full concession stand, around 50 basket raffles, and a 50/50 raffle currently at \$2,010. All board members and their families are welcome and encouraged to attend this fun event.

**Foster Grandparents: Brandi Newell**

Ms. Newell reported that all but one volunteer is currently assigned to classroom(s) in local schools and daycares. The remaining new volunteer is waiting for a release from physical therapy. Two additional volunteers are on medical leave.

The Illinois Department on Aging's monitoring visit in May resulted in "no findings." The monitoring letter detailing the final outcome was received in late August.

Ms. Newell recently had the opportunity to speak to a group of approximately 60 people about Tri-County Opportunities Council and the Foster Grandparent Program. Approximately 25% of attendees had heard of our Agency. Brandi encouraged board members to collect inspirational information at monthly board meetings that they can share in conversation.

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

Ms. DeSpain sought board approval for the 2023-2024 Early Head Start/Head Start Self-Assessment document, including the 2024-2025 Early Head Start/Head Start Program Improvement Initiatives. These initiatives were determined through in-depth analysis of self-assessment documentation in each

component area, such as checklists, observations, parent surveys, staff surveys, interviews, program monitoring tools, Child Plus reports, tracking reports, etc. All targeted initiatives, unless expressly indicated as either the Early Head Start or the Head Start program specifically, apply to all services for children birth to five and their respective families. Mr. Kleppin made a motion to approve the 2023-2024 Early Head Start/Head Start Self-Assessment document. Mr. Hockstadt seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Ms. DeSpain pointed members to the OHS Program Instruction included in tonight's handouts. The ACF-OHS-PI-24-25, Final Rule on Supporting the Head Start Workforce and Consistent Quality Programming, published on August 21, 2024, sets forth the most significant changes to Head Start and Early Head Start in almost a decade. With dozens of new requirements, new policy aspirations, and revisions to existing provisions, the rule will have a sweeping impact on Head Start and Early Head Start and the children, families, and staff. Areas of focus include wages and benefits to support the Head Start workforce, better integration of mental health across all aspects of Head Start programming, and Quality improvement and clarity of requirements in other service areas. Also included in tonight's handout is a timeline for when the new standards must be in place.

Tonight's board packet includes copies of the Head Start and the Early Head Start Program Information Reports (PIRs) for the 2023-24 school year. These reports encompass comprehensive data from the 2023-24 school year on the services, staff, children, and families served by both Head Start and Early Head Start programs. The PIR is a crucial source of descriptive and service data for the Head Start community, their partners, Congress, and the general public. PIR data is compiled for use at the federal, regional, state, and local levels

Ms. DeSpain brought copies of the program's Annual Report. She will mail copies to those not present in person for tonight's meeting. This report reflects program services during the 2023-24 program year and includes Program Information Report (PIR) data for that year. Ms. DeSpain asked that the members review the report and bring thoughts and questions to the October board meeting for discussion.

A School Readiness 2023-2024 document was also provided to members in tonight's handouts. She explained that through intentional teaching, developmentally appropriate activities, and best teaching practices, staff will work with the children daily to heighten each child's progress. This document demonstrates children's growth across six domains for the 2023-2024 school year. It also provides information on children's developmental growth specifically related to the program's School Readiness Goals, which are dispersed across five central domains. This data is used at several levels including curriculum planning, partnering with parents, identifying opportunities for professional development, identifying classroom inventory needs, etc.

On August 28, 2024, the Administration for Children and Families issued two formal letters regarding the full-enrollment initiative that began in February 2023. One letter outlined the action they would be taking against the Early Head Start section of the program, and the other addressed Head Start.

Head Start: We are writing to inform you that the Office of Head Start (OHS) has designated Tri-County Opportunities Council, Grant No. 05CH012543, chronically under-enrolled, pursuant to Section 641A(h)(5) of the Head Start Act. Given the measurable progress towards full enrollment, OHS will not reduce Tri-County Opportunities Council base grant at this time. However, please be advised that OHS recognizes that your agency will likely have unobligated funds at the end of the current fiscal year, and that these funds may be subject to recapture.

Early Head Start: We are writing to inform you that the Office of Head Start (OHS) has designated Tri-County Opportunities Council, Grant No. 05CH012543, chronically under-enrolled, pursuant to section 641A(h)(5) of the Head Start Act. OHS has determined that Tri-County Opportunities Council's Early Head Start Program's base grant funding and enrollment levels must be reduced based on unsatisfactory progress made towards achieving full enrollment over the last 12 months. This action is being taken pursuant to Section 641A(h)(5)(ii) of the Head Start Act.

Ms. DeSpain informed the membership that board action was needed to ratify the Executive Committee's approval on Friday, April 20, 2024, to submit an appeal to the Office of Head Start and Administration for Children and Families regarding the recent notification of a forced reduction and recapture of funds from the Early Head Start program. Discussion followed. Ms. McPerryman made a motion to approve submitting a letter of appeal. Mr. Hockstadt seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

In tonight's handouts, members also received copies of the August 2024 Policy Council minutes, July and August 2024 Board Reports, enrollment status reports, job posting listings, and the non-federal in-kind donation sheet.

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

LIHEAP has been very busy with auto-enrolls, scheduling appointments, setting up offices and training. They are ready for the program start up on October 1. The PIPP department has also been busy with re-certifications in all nine counties. Ms. Saenz has already received around 10 phone calls for furnace emergencies.

It looks to be a very interesting new program year with the new Solar For All (Ameren and Com Ed electric) and the LIDR (Low income discount Rates) for Ameren and Nicor gas customers.

**Weatherization/Housing Program: Wayne Thompson**

Mr. Thompson stated that the 2024 Weatherization Programs HHS (Health & Human Services) and state funding portions are winding down and have a September 30 end date. All the carryover funds have been allocated to the multi-family jobs. Weatherization, along with the fiscal department, will complete

the closeout process for the HHS and state grants and submit them to DCEO (Dept. of Commerce & Economic Opportunity) prior to the November 14 deadline.

They continue to work on the rental units at the Victor Meadows Senior Living Apartments in Princeton and are winding down that project. They are down to four seven-unit buildings and one four-unit building, which had to be done separately from the others but in the exact same manner. As with the other units, the residents received new furnaces, central air conditioners, water heaters, refrigerators, LED lighting, R-60 attic insulation, low-flow shower and sink aerators, etc.

He also mentioned that they continue working on setting up the new Weatherization System (IWX) for weatherization applications, assessments, and work orders. Program field staff continue to train on the new system while DCEO continues to work through issues present within the new system. DCEO has been very diligent about informing the network and holding bridge calls weekly or more often to keep them up to date and to report on additional issues encountered. Customers cannot use the system yet to sign up, but they will be sure to update everyone as soon as it is working and they know the exact procedures for doing so.

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

Tonight's packet includes a copy of our updated Personally Identifiable Information Policy. The information on page two was added to our previous policy to address the process and procedures that would follow in the event of a data breach, should that happen. Ms. Calkins sought board action to approve the updated Personally Identifiable Information (PII) Policy. Mr. Klepping made a motion to approve the updated PII Policy. Ms. McPerryman seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Ms. Calkins reports that the only current board vacancy is for Whiteside County, Category C. If members know of someone who may be interested, they can either have them contact her directly or provide her with their contact information. This can be someone elected who themselves are below 200% FPL or someone representing those below this threshold. They must put out a legal notice and hold a caucus, so time is of the essence.

She shared that she is working with the Illinois Association for Community Action Agencies to develop an online board orientation for new members. Since board members join at different times throughout the year, this will allow new members to complete the orientation at a time convenient for them instead of trying to find a time that works for everyone. The online orientation will be comprehensive, and along with training documents, it will include things such as Board By-Laws, a Board Member Directory, Financial Reports, the Agency Strategic Plan, Individual Program Information, and much more. Unfortunately, it will take some time to develop, so she will need to have a virtual orientation in early October for our newest members. This would include Stephanie Foes, Sonjia Martin, Lynnae Garrett, Kristy Jones, Becky Rich, and Denise Russell. She requested feedback on a day/time. The only suggestion was not to hold it on a Monday.

Ms. Calkins expressed that it is hard to believe it is that time of the year again, but the Personnel Committee will need to meet to take care of a few personnel items prior to the November meeting. Meetings will need to be held in October/November to discuss any necessary changes to the Human Resource Policy and Procedures Manual, complete the President/CEO appraisal, and update the Salary/Wage Classification by Position document. More to come on this.

Ms. Calkins informed members that a federal government shutdown after September 30 is possible, but they will likely pass another Continuing Resolution. Either way, 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 the mission. Staff will continue to receive their pay and benefits and will continue to assist customers.

**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, October 24, 2024, at the Bureau County Metro Center, 837 Park Avenue West, Princeton, IL 61356, at 6:00 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at 7:31 p.m.