

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

Chair Harmon called the meeting to order at 6:00 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)

Charlotte Balensiefen, Sue Britt, Robin Camplain, **Mary Cork**, Bernene Dahl, Kim Dahl, Stephanie Foes, Lynnae Garrett, **Al Harmon**, **Marcia Heuer**, **John Hockstadt**, **Tom Howes**, Julie Jacobs, **Betty Johnson**, **Lisa Johnson**, Kristy Jones, Betsy Kinder, **Ron Kleppin**, Ginny McPerryman, Ronald Preston, Juanita Randklev, **Denise Russell**, **David Torres**, **Jeanne Vargas**, and Laura Watters.

**Members Absent:**

Reed Akre, Susan Bursztynsky, David Ditzler, BJ Holocker, Kenneth Krogulski, Brad Lindstrom, Sonjia Martin, Michael McEmery, Inga Neuner, Linda Pennell, Becky Rich, Marissa Trumper, and Derek Whited.

**Others Present:**

Jill Calkins, Rachael DeSpain, Vanessa Hoffeditz, Dawn Kanzler, Brandi Newell, Tammy Saenz, and Neddie Watts.

**Minutes:**

The September 24, 2024, Board Minutes were previously sent to all members for review. Mr. Kleppin made a motion to approve the minutes, which Ms. Balensiefen seconded. A roll call vote was called, and the motion carried.

**Financial Report:**

The August 2024 Financial Reports were provided to the membership for review prior to tonight's meeting. Ms. Lisa Johnson made a motion to accept the August 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 sought Board action to ratify the Executive Committee's approval on October 11, 2024, to accept the Agency's 2023 403(b) Thrift Plan financial statements and ERISA required supplemental schedule. Mr. Hockstadt made a motion to approve the acceptance of the Agency's 2023 403(b) Thrift Plan financial statements and ERISA required supplemental schedule. Ms. Randklev seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

She also sought Board action to ratify the Executive Committee's approval on October 11, 2024, to file the IRS 5500 Return/Report of Employee Benefit Plan for the Agency's Thrift Plan for the year ending December 31, 2023. Mr. Preston made a motion to approve the filing of the IRS 5500 Return/Report of Employee Benefit Plan for the Agency's Thrift Plan. Mr. Kleppin seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Next, she sought Board approval to accept the Personnel Committee's recommendation to have Blue Cross Blue Shield as the agency's medical, dental, vision, and life insurance provider, effective January 1, 2025. Ms. Lisa Johnson made a motion to approve Blue Cross Blue Shield as the Agency's provider, and Ms. Vargas seconded the motion. A vote was called, and the motion carried.

Ms. Kanzler shared that the September ending book balance was (\$71,501.74.) As of September 30, 2024, \$600,000 was owed on the line of credit with Sauk Valley Bank. She also shared that on a good note, the Agency's Edward Jones unrestricted account has grown to \$461,636.53, almost \$100,000 more than a year ago.

#### **Program Reports:**

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

Ms. Watts sought Board approval to apply for a \$15,000 grant from the Church Women United of Princeton, Illinois. The funds would offset the food pantry's rent and utility expenses. Mr. Kleppin made a motion to approve applying for the \$15,000 grant. Mr. Howes 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 CSBG Grant Manager that explained the services provided for each CSBG Work Program from January through the end of September. In addition, Ms. Watts reported that a back-to-back form with information from all grants was included in the packets. Each report indicates the amount the program proposed to serve and the actual number of persons served to date from the grant year. The report is a quarterly report used to provide information to grant managers.

She also stated that a listing of community partners, requested during last month's meeting, was included in the Board packets. These partnerships are primarily with CSBG outreach staff; however, some also work with other Agency programs. She stated that this listing is updated annually and usually consists of adding more partners that have developed coordinated services with staff. Discussion followed, and members provided some updates and additional partnership possibilities.

She reported that the packets included an upcoming Emergency and Transitional Housing and Homeless Prevention program monitoring review. The review is scheduled for October 31 at 10:00 as a WebEx meeting. Ms. Watts said she would provide the review outcome during the November Board meeting. Additionally, the CSBG monitoring review that was initially scheduled in September has now been rescheduled for the week of November 18.

Ms. Watts stated that members interested in purchasing an Agency t-shirt could let her know and that she would send them an order form. She indicated she had some forms available tonight for those attending in person. All order forms and payments are due back to her no later than November 26.

Finally, she shared that earlier in the year, she informed the Board that the Whiteside County outreach staff, in addition to an Early Head Start/Head Start Recruiter, two LIHEAP employees, and a few Weatherization employees, were set to move into a new location provided by the Coloma Township. However, the township ran into some building code issues, and staff were never able to fully move in and serve customers. Earlier this month, the Coloma Township informed them they would sell the building as they could not afford to make all the necessary repairs. While this news was unfortunate, Ms. Watts happily reported that they were able to find new space in Sterling and would be moved in before November 1. This new space, designed as a one-stop center, will allow them to meet with customers more efficiently and, more importantly, offer bundled services to those seeking assistance. It is being called the TCOC Service Hub.

**Foster Grandparents: Brandi Newell**

Ms. Newell reported that all volunteers are currently assigned to classroom(s) in local schools and childcare centers but, unfortunately, many are currently out of classrooms on medical leave. Ms. Newell asked members to keep them in their hearts and well wishes as they continue to heal.

The Board handouts contain a copy of the letter from the Illinois Department on Aging, which was discussed at the September meeting and reports that the May monitoring visit had “no findings.”

She informed the Board that it is not too early to refer volunteers to the program for 2025-2026. This is especially true if new schools must be recruited to accommodate volunteers outside the program’s established sites. Please send potential future Foster Grandparents her direction. She reminded Board members who serve on other Boards or are members of clubs or other community groups that she is always available to speak about Tri-County Opportunities Council and the Foster Grandparent Program.

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

Ms. DeSpain reported that parents and guardians of the program continue to share the many challenges they have experienced when attempting to meet the mandatory medical and dental requirements. As a DCFS-licensed program and under the Head Start Performance Standards, any accepted child must meet specific health requirements before attending. The only exceptions to these requirements are those without a home or those enrolled in the Early Head Start Home Base Program. Throughout our nine-county service area, resources available to families with state-issued insurance continue to decline, and those accepting state-issued medical insurance have lengthy waiting lists. Following the program’s October site discussions, the need to better connect, guide, and support families through this process was identified. This will be a primary focus of the entire program. Discussion followed.

On September 27, 2024, the program submitted its appeal of the forced reduction and the recapturing of funds to the Administration for Children and Families. This appeal is specific to the Early Head Start program and notes the Administration's failure to use allowable flexibilities, remain transparent, and acknowledge the national staffing shortages plaguing educational institutions. In the near future, the program will request Board support to submit a request to convert and reduce additional enrollment slots. This will allow the program to re-design its structure, better meet the needs of communities, and support and compensate Head Start employees.

In tonight's handouts, Ms. DeSpain provided copies of the September 2024 Policy Council minutes, September Board Report, enrollment status report, job posting listings, and the non-federal in-kind donation sheet. She asked that members please encourage interested candidates to visit the Agency's website at [www.tcochelps.org](http://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 reported that the LIHEAP department has been extremely busy with emergency applications and an overwhelming amount of phone calls. To date, they have entered 2,594 applications, with 545 receiving benefits. Most of those receiving benefits were emergency applications. A usual day will account for 20- 40 emergency applications that must be completed before the regular applications. Ms. Saenz has already completed ten furnaces, and she is sure to see the need continue as the weather gets colder.

LIHEAP has been experiencing an extremely high volume of phone calls and voicemails since the start of the program year, and staff are trying to return calls promptly. As quickly as they are returning calls, more calls are coming in. They are asking customers to please be patient during this exceptionally busy period. If members know someone having difficulty reaching an outreach office, they can refer them to the main office.

She reported that while they expected to start the program year sharing information about the Illinois Solar for All program with customers, advocacy for the program has been put on hold.

**Weatherization/Housing Program: The Weatherization report was given by Jill Calkins**

Ms. Calkins shared that the new IWX system continues to have glitches, but it gets a bit better every day, and agencies can now start processing jobs. Customers can now complete the pre-app online. A link to the online pre-app has been added to the Agency website.

During this downtime, the program has continued work on the multi complex in Princeton. She believes they are down to having only one of the 11 buildings left to finish. This is perfect timing, as it will allow them to jump into single-family homes as soon as the system allows.

The Weatherization department has had some turnover due to a couple of employees retiring. Mr. Thompson will recruit and hire additional employees upon his return. The new assessor, who started in early October, will begin IHWAP training in South Holland at the end of the month. The new maintenance worker has been busy working on vacant rentals and preparing them for new renters.

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

Ms. Calkins reports that the only current Board vacancy is for Whiteside County, Category C. She does have an interested individual, and they will be holding a caucus soon. Due to the length of time it has taken to find someone, she has requested and already received approval from DCEO for a 90-day extension to fill the vacancy.

As stated at the last meeting, we need to hold a New Board Member Orientation for our newest members. The orientation has been scheduled for November 5, 2024, at 2:30. An agenda will be mailed out to those involved early next week.

A Planning/Evaluation Committee meeting will also need to be scheduled to discuss the Board's self-evaluation results. Current committee members include Ginny McPerryman, Juanita Randklev, Linda Pennell, Jeanne Vargas, and Betty Johnson.

Next, she is working to get some meetings on our schedule for the Personnel Committee. The committee must 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. She has requested availability via email from committee members. Based on their responses, she will determine the best days/times.

**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 26, 2024, at the Wesley United Methodist Church, 2200 16th Avenue, Sterling, IL., at 6:00 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at 6:58 p.m.