



POLK COUNTY EARLY CHILDHOOD IOWA BOARD MEETING
United Way of Central Iowa
Leadership Room
September 24, 2025

Voting Members Present: Shay Scholtes, Kevin Abler, Dave Arens, Gabrielle Brooks, Suzanne Cohrs, Sam Early, Matthew Klemme, Megan Schultheis; Participating via Teams
Tabitha Choquette; Josh Laraby joined via Teams at 8:29 a.m.

Voting Members Absent: Jake Al-Mazroa, Jessica Bruning, Alicia Chilton, Stephanie Giusto, Christian Ramirez, Eric Tubbs, Stephen White

Ex-Officio Members Present: Aaron Johnson

Ex-Officio Members Absent: Brooke Rosenberg, Emily Westergaard

Staff Present: Barb Bremner, Jody Kanne

Guests Present: Jill Friestad-Tate, President, Raising Readers in the Heartland; Ashley Molzen, Community Engagement Manager, Des Moines Public Library; Cassie Odland, Family Wellbeing Director and Virginia Atwell Program Manager, both ISU Extension; Rachel Muhs, Director of Strategic Corporate Partnerships, Healthy Birth Day, Inc.

Welcome

Board Vice Chair Shay Scholtes welcomed members and called the meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. Quorum was met at this time. Board member introductions were made and new member Gabrielle Brooks was welcomed to the board.

Approval August Minutes

Minutes of board meeting August 27, 2025, were presented. There were no comments or corrections.

A motion to approve the August 2025 minutes was made by Dave Arens and seconded by Suzanne Cohrs. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

July/August FY26 Financial Report

Bremner presented the July/August FY26 financial report. Expenditures are tracking as expected. August program expenditures reflect program services provided in July.

Audit Committee meets monthly to review expenditure report with Bremner. Audit committee members: Abler and Laraby. Matthew Klemme volunteered to join the committee. This month Laraby reviewed financials with Bremner. The contract for Oak Academy Wage Enhancement has been executed.

HHS has requested a plan for non-contracted funds from all ECI areas to be submitted by October 31st. Bremner will bring ideas to the October board meeting for members to discuss. Bremner shared Capitol Park Early Learning Center's board has voted to close the center mid-October. Staff and families were notified August 29th. Tammy Engebretson, IAEYC ECQuIP, is working with families and center staff to find alternative care and employment. Polk County ECI will pay the Q1 Wage Enhancement stipends to staff then send a letter terminating the center contract effective October 31, 2025. Remaining contract funds will be moved to the non-contracted line item in the budget.

A motion to approve the July/August FY26 financials was made by Kevin Abler and seconded by Sam Early. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Healthy Birth Day funding request for Count the Kicks Community Baby Shower

Rachel Muhs, Director of Strategic Corporate Partnerships, Healthy Birth Day, Inc. presented on the history of the non-profit and details of their Des Moines Community Baby Shower event on Friday, October 17th from 4:00- 7:00 p.m. at the EMC Expo Center. Muhs presented a request for a \$10,000 investment in the event.

A motion to approve \$10,000 for the Healthy Birth Day event was made by Sam Early and seconded by Kevin Abler. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Bremner shared Raising Readers in the Heartland has agreed to be a part of our sponsor table at the event.

Contract Monitoring Schedule

Bremner reviewed the Contract Monitoring Schedule.

Josh Laraby joined the meeting via Teams at 8:29 a.m.

Due to new state service types of Tool O reporting requirements staff and United Way are unable to make the extensive changes required in Scorecard. Bremner has created a new reporting tool in Excel for programs to use for their quarterly reporting of program outcomes. United Way data team will assist in finalizing the Excel reporting tool.

Bremner will upload the approved Contract Monitoring Schedule document into Iowa Grants by the September 30th deadline.

A motion to approve the Contract Monitoring Schedule was made by Suzanne Cohrs and seconded by Matthew Klemme. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Literacy Programs:

Jill Friestad-Tate, President, Raising Readers in the Heartland, shared a presentation which covered the history of the non-profit and their partnership with the Dolly Parton Imagination Library. Board funding has allowed them to serve two new zip codes in Des Moines: 50309 and 50314.

Cassie Odland, Family Wellbeing Director, and Virginia Atwell, Program Manager, with the ISU Extension Small Talk program presented a PowerPoint presentation on ISU Extensions work and the Small Talk program. Odland and Atwell are delivery three classes in 2025 and in the second half of the fiscal year are planning for two to four more in English and Spanish.

Ashley Molzen, Community Engagement Manager, Des Moines Public Library, presented a PowerPoint presentation on the library's Simple Steps program and their community partnerships. Molzen highlighted a few of the many community partnerships. These include many of the coalition centers, the DMPS early childhood program, FosterSQUAD, EMBARC, YWRC, and LSI's child care business development program.

Administrative Report

Bremner's full administrative report was included with meeting materials.

- HHS Director Kelly Garcia has resigned as of mid-October. Larry Johnson, current Director of the Iowa Department of Inspections, Appeals and Licensing (DIAL) has been appointed to lead HHS as Garcia's successor.
- Capitol Park Early Learning Center board has made the decision to close the center mid-October. The center is being supported by Engebretson and the IAEEYC ECQuIP team. Classroom materials will be distributed to other coalition centers.
- EveryStep will hold their first quarterly Polk County Area Stakeholder meeting for Maternal/Child/Family Health programs Monday, September 29th from 3 – 4 p.m. in the United Way Conference Center.
- The ECI State Board will hold a work session Friday, October 17th from 9 – noon. Focus will be reorganization into districts. Bremner will share more information and the Zoom link when provided by HHS.
- Board members are invited to attend the Healthy Birth Day Community Baby Shower Friday, October 17th from 4 – 7 p.m. at the EMC Insurance Expo Center – Junior Ballroom.

Old Business

None.

New Business

None.

Public Comment

None.

Adjournment

Sam Early made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Suzanne Cohrs seconded. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Scholtes adjourned the meeting at 9:33 a.m.