

**Iowa Network Against Human Trafficking & Slavery  
Board of Directors  
June 13, 2023 Meeting Minutes**

**Present:** John Chesser, George Belitsos, Maggie Tinsman, Tom Barr, Alyse Hardin, Alka Khanolkar, Shirley Fineran, Lyna Debner, Deanna Jensen, Bernadette Rixner, Gretchen Brown-Waech, Kim Smith, Linda Harrell, Jessica Hagin, Jessica Teaney

**Excused:** Chief Mike Tupper, Stephanie Olson, Grace Lohse

**Guests:** Maddie Judas (Technology Consultant)

**1. Call to order and attendance; start recording (John)**

Chesser called the meeting to order at 2:30 p.m.

**2. Consent agenda items and resignations (John):**

- a. **May meeting minutes (see “May NAHT Board Meeting Minutes”)**
- b. **May treasurer’s report (see “May 2023 Treasurer’s Report”)**
- c. **Resignations of Kim Smith and Alka Khanolkar**

Chesser first asked if anybody had any questions or concerns about the May NAHT Board Meeting Minutes. Belitsos noted that he doesn’t have any changes but he does have an update about Roxanne Reisburg’s Department of Health and Human Services report. He stated that Reiburg is still researching the numbers to answer his question regarding the total number of child sex trafficking incidents for 2022.

Tinsman then asked Brown-Waech a question regarding the number of human trafficking programs across the state that are funded by the Attorney General’s office. Brown-Waech reported there are 51 funded programs but Tinsman questioned why only three are human trafficking-specific programs across the state. Brown-Waech responded, saying they might need to be some corrections to some of her comments, and requested that her comments be exempted from approval so she can look at and change some of them. Chesser mentioned that Brown-Waech sent all of the correct information and statistics ahead of time in an email, so if there are any questions or changes to be made to the minutes, to go back to that email. He then made a motion to approve the minutes. **The June minutes were approved unanimously.**

Chesser then asked if there were any questions about the May Treasurer’s Report. Tinsman had a question regarding the total deposits made, as the numbers are different. Judas noted that that was just a typing error and that she would correct it. Belitsos thanked Tinsman for catching that error. Belitsos then noted that our income has really been dropping in 2023 and urged the Fundraising Committee to begin meeting. Chesser noted that he is encouraging Jensen to schedule a fundraising committee meeting soon. Chesser made a motion to approve the June

Treasurer's Report. **The June Treasurer's Report was approved unanimously.**

Chesser lastly announced the resignation of Kim Smith and Alka Khanokar from the board as an announcement. Belitsos made a motion to accept these resignations with regret and Chesser and Belitsos thanked them for all of the work they had done for the board throughout the years. **The resignations were approved unanimously.**

### **3. Unexpected cuts to victim services budgets (Gretchen, Alyse)**

Chesser asked Brown-Waech and Hagin to fill in the board (from their perspective) as to what has been going on with the various Victim Services budget cuts happening out of nowhere. There was confusion about the numbers and reason for these cuts, so, Brown-Waech was able to present the board with a Iowa Specific VOCA summary of these cuts which is below:

#### **What is VOCA and what funding cuts are being made?**

The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) uses non-taxpayer money from the Crime Victims Fund (CVF) for programs that serve victims of crime. Nationally, these funds support services for over 6 million victims of all types of crimes annually through 6,462 direct service organizations, including Resilience.

#### **How will these cuts impact Resilience?**

The maximum Resilience will receive from ICASA this year is \$510,000 compared to \$1,035,000 which we received last year. The loss could even be more severe. These cuts can lead to hiring freeze, potential furlough, and/or layoffs for Resilience staff. Our advocates, therapists, and educators are dedicated to supporting survivors and providing them with the best care, support, and empowerment but they cannot do that without funding.

#### **Jobs Lost**

Approximately 80% of victim services funding supports payroll and benefits. From October 1, 2019, through September 30, 2021, victim services supported the equivalent of 1,191 full-time jobs. This funding includes all victim services, not just VOCA. **Based on 2 years of anticipated VOCA cuts:**

With the Federal Fiscal Year 2021 VOCA award, which Iowa will receive by 10/1/2021, CVAD anticipates **the equivalent of 105 full-time jobs** will be affected with the CVAD grant year October 2021, to September 2022, which is most of the state fiscal year 2022 and part of the state fiscal year 2023.

With the Federal Fiscal Year 2022 VOCA award, which Iowa will receive by 10/1/2022, CVAD anticipates **the equivalent of 500 full-time jobs** will be affected with the CVAD grant year

October 2022 to September 2023, which is most of the state fiscal year 2023 and part of the state fiscal year 2024.

### **Victims Who Will Go Unserved**

Before COVID ended, grantees recruited thousands of Iowans to volunteer to assist with victim services, including advocacy and direct services to victims. Because of COVID, volunteers have nearly disappeared and fundraising events have dwindled.

### **The following numbers represent victims served with all CVAD funds:**

**2015:** 34,216 **2016:** 46,643 **2017:** 64,072 **2018:** 77,147 **2019:** 81,646 **2020:** 55,902 For 2015-2018 the CVAD grant year was July-June (the same as the state fiscal year). The 2019 grant cycle was July to September (15-months) and in 2020 the grant year shifted to an October to September cycle (the same as the federal fiscal year). The grant year 2021 victims served numbers will be available in December 2021.

In July 2018, the State of Iowa decreased their funding appropriation for victim services by more than \$1.7 million. This is the same year the VOCA award decreased by 16.89%. Because CVAD could not anticipate VOCA would increase more than 78% the next year, we cut approximately \$1.34 million from our grantees' budgets. We stopped funding 4 projects – a culturally specific chat line, the sexual abuse hotline, which was folded into the domestic violence hotline, a culturally specific program serving the LGBTQI population and one county prosecutor-based victim witness coordinator.

When VOCA increased with the Federal Fiscal Year 2016 award, CVAD funded a wide array of organizations whose mission, outreach and expertise serves youth, LGBTQI, detained youth, urban youth, older Iowans, men and boys of color, immigrants and refugees, people with disabilities, people in crisis, victims experiencing mental health issues, victims in need of legal assistance, homeless victims and trafficked victims.

Additional VOCA funding allowed for the planning and creation of Central Iowa Trauma Recovery Center, a newly formed organization dedicated to providing culturally responsive approaches to providing mental health, legal advocacy, medication management and assertive outreach to survivors of trauma in central Iowa.

Other than the report, Brown-Waech also noted that regarding human trafficking services across the state, there were a total of five applications, out of which two were selected for funding. There was a total grant of \$307,425 for human trafficking. The funded organizations are Breaking Traffic and Portland Family Services, located in Pasadena and parts of Southwest. During a session, it was evident that there were budget constraints, resulting in limited funding. Breaking Traffic received a little over \$241,000. The Crime Victim Assistance Store chose to fund them \$171,767, representing a 29% decrease. Unfortunately, the other three applications were not funded due to insufficient funds.

Hardin asked which other agency received funding and how much they received. Brown-Waech responded stating it was the Heartland Family Service Sanctuary Human Trafficking Services and they were funded at \$135,658. Hardin mentioned that her agency had proposed \$421,107 in their application for their budget. Hardin then noted that they will be trying to find new budgeting opportunities.

Harms also proposed that in order to strike conversations and awareness with human trafficking, we need to paint a picture about trafficking, something that is visual like a map. Hardin agreed. Tupper also made a comment saying he is having serious conversations about what services he will need to cut within his police department due to this budget cut and believes that this has not been the state of Iowa's priority, even when they have the opportunity to allocate money toward this important issue.

#### **4. Research Committee Update on conversation with Andrea of Family Crisis Center call center (Stephanie)**

Since Olson was not at today's meeting, Chesser gave a short update. He noted that Andrea from Family Crisis Centers and the research committee met and had a wide range of discussions on how to paint a picture of trafficking with a real-life human story rather than reducing it to just numbers and statistics. He lastly noted that reducing things to just numbers and statistics doesn't necessarily serve a purpose in telling the story so that people really understand how critical the problem really is.

#### **5. Recap of District 6000 Rotary Action Team Collaboration w/ the NAHT (George)**

Belitsos began his report by reading one of NAHT's strategic plan goals from last year, stating, "Recruit members of Iowa's largest service organization, which is Rotary, to serve on the NAHT board and to collaborate and support Iowa Rotary District 6000 and the 67 local Rotary clubs to engage in awareness and 2023 prevention projects." Belitsos suggested that Chesser should mark off on this year's strategic plan that the goal has been met. Belitsos then gave a summary of what the action team is and who on the NAHT board is a part of the Rotary District 6000 Action Team.

Belitsos mentioned that the action team now has a total of 20 clubs out of 67 that are a part of the Action Team, and one of the programs that the action team has really taken up is promoting Iowa Businesses Against Trafficking (IBAT). He also mentioned that they have partnered with Secretary of State, Paul Pate to help members of the action team promote IBAT in their local communities. He mentioned that Paul Pate has spoken to at least half of the clubs at their meetings, promoting it and showing a slideshow where he educates the public and Rotarians about human trafficking.

Belitsos stated that there are now about 700 members of IBAT, and getting members has really slowed down so Rotary clubs are trying to promote it within their local communities, with a goal

of reaching 1,000 members. IBAT has now changed so instead of only being available to corporations to become members, IBAT has now expanded to church organizations, schools, nonprofits, and Rotary clubs themselves.

Belitsos closed his recap by stating that a lot of the clubs are distributing the NAHT's hotline stickers and are now funding the stickers, which now have the Rotary logo on them. The collaboration between the NAHT and Rotary has distributed over 15,000 stickers. He noted that he is very proud of the 20 Rotary clubs.

## **6. Recap on the Pieper Lewis sentencing. (George)**

Belitsos first mentioned that there is information in the blog post/newsletter about the outcome of the sentencing and the NAHT's position. He stated that our position is that the NAHT stands with Shared Hope International with the written position that society should protect and not punish child sex trafficking victims. This position has become a law in over 30 states but not here in Iowa.

Since the hearing, Belitsos mentioned that there was a lot of discussion about the correctional facility that Pieper Lewis will be staying in during her 5 years of probation, considering she ran away from her first correctional facility. Belitsos mentioned that what Lewis really needs is a program that works with trafficking victims and provides trauma-informed care.

Belitsos then shared an email that was sent to him by one of Pieper Lewis' attorneys, Matthew Sheely: "We truly appreciate the support you and your friends and colleagues with the Network Against Human Trafficking have been doing to assist us. There are a number of things we simply cannot comment upon including the issue of a pardon."

Belitsos had asked for their opinion on a pardon and whether we need to consider supporting this as a network. That takes a board vote, but they cannot legally comment on this. This constitutes a breach of their ethical obligation as lawyers. Belitsos is not recommending that we consider this petition, which has already been signed by over 15,000 people from all across the country.

Belitsos noted that Pieper herself has asked for a pardon. Belitsos thinks we need to hear support from the attorneys before we consider supporting a pardon. Belitsos shared that Pieper's legal team is actively working on a solution that affords Pieper with a placement option that is more suitable than a community-based correctional facility, like Fresh Start.

Belitsos then mentioned that Pieper requested that some of the donated money that was raised for her, she would like to use these funds and her voice in the fight against human

trafficking and help other survivors. Sheeley then noted in his email to Belitsos that they have been bombarded with interview requests across the country but the last thing Lewis needs is more publicity so they will not be doing any of these interviews.

#### **7. Request from Jerry Brimeyer and Susan Mitchell to use excerpts of our hotel/motel video (John)**

Chesser noted that he wrote up an agreement mostly stating that they can show it in the live demonstration, they can't change anything and he wrote up a little one-pager, it's a contract, and the board could use it as a template for anybody else who wants to use this video as well. He then asked the board if this was okay. Tinsman made a motion to approve the agreement. Barr seconded the motion, **The agreement was approved unanimously.**

**8. Suggestions for the NAHT legislative agenda for the 2024 session (Maggie)** Tinsman noted that next fall, the Network will decide on the legislative priorities for 2024, so the board needs to think of things that are important to include. Tinsman mentioned sending legislative ideas to her to be considered for next year,

#### **9. Survivor volunteers. What should our response be when a survivor contacts NAHT and offers to volunteer? (John, Alyse)**

Chesser mentioned that he and Hardin had received an email from a survivor who wanted to volunteer to help the board. Chesser noted that the board should begin to think about what they should do when they are contacted by a survivor because it is an extremely delicate issue that should be taken with caution.

Tinsman mentioned that Hardin should definitely take on the role of investigating this further since she is qualified and deals with survivors more frequently than anyone else on the board.

Finernan noted that it would be extremely helpful to have a survivor on the board but mentioned that the trauma is still going to be there for that survivor, so it would be good for the board to have parameters and guidelines first before moving forward. Rixner noted that it would be a good idea to ask for input from survivors already working in the area on how to go about this without triggering survivor's trauma. Chesser agreed.

Belitsos noted that when survivors have contacted him in the past with interest in volunteering, he directs them to service provider agencies. Chesser responded saying that in almost every case, that has worked fine but with this particular survivor, it is different and would be a good fit in helping the NAHT. Chesser then noted that since the board does not have a meeting in July, to use that time to come up with proposals to address in August on several of the things discussed in this meeting. Hardin noted that since the survivor is awaiting a response, she will reach out to her and that she does think we need to change our approach with survivor volunteers.

## **10. Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned at 4:06