



BOARD MEETING MINUTES

October 25, 2024

Board of Directors:

Col. Josefa Benjamin, Board Chair; Rebecca Brock, Vice Chair; Michael Lepera, Treasurer; Lois Marino, Secretary; Amy Black, Bill Reicherter, Chelsea Bellew, Donna Korn, Dr. Heidi Schaeffer, Maria Mezerhane, Mark Dhooge, Meghan Russell, Nancy W. Stamper, Paul Adams, Dr. Ronald Ford, Sabria McElroy, Dr. Victoria Thurston

Unable to Attend:

Bill Reicherter, Meghan Russell, Michael Lepera, Paul Adams

Other Attendees:

ChildNet Staff: Larry Rein, Neiko Shea, Donna Eprifania, Julie DeMar, Susan Eby, Alcolya St. Juste, Deena Ponto, Sheryl Williams, Shauna Thomas, Shanny Tozzi, Kaydion Watson, Taykha Samedy, Briana Calzada, Christiana Ramlogan, Fiona Evans, Waverly Edwards, Julie Janello, *DCF:* Traci Schweitzer, Adrienne Reid, Isis Williams, *PB County:* Elisa Cramer, *Public:* Dawn Watts, Stefanie Title

CALL TO ORDER – Col. Josefa Benjamin, Board Chair

- Col. Josefa Benjamin, Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 8:01 a.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Lois Marino, Board Secretary

- Roll was taken, and quorum was established.

The September 27, 2024 meeting minutes were reviewed. *A motion* was moved and seconded to approve the minutes. *A vote was taken.* The ayes have it and *the motion was adopted.*

CHILDNET BOARD EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AWARD – Julie DeMar, CPO

- The ChildNet Board Employee Recognition Award was presented to the following deserving employees:
 - September 2024 – Christiana Ramlogan, Dependency Case Manager, Unit E4 (Bwd)
Taykha Samedy, Family Finding Specialist (Bwd)

DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

- **Independent Living** – Julie DeMar, CPO provided a brief overview of the Independent Living department, which operates in both Broward and Palm Beach Counties, who serves youth aged 17 to 17.5 in licensed foster placements (group homes or foster homes), youth transitioning from dependency case management to the independent living program, with a focus on adulthood preparation, and young adults in *Extended Foster Care (EFC)*, *Postsecondary Education Services and Support (PESS)*, or those requiring Aftercare services. Ms. DeMar provided detailed points on the eligibility requirements and services provided for the EFC, PESS and Aftercare Services. The overview concluded with gratitude for the efforts of the Independent Living Team and a call for continued dialogue to enhance support mechanisms.



COMMITTEE UPDATES

- **Community Engagement Committee – Lois Marino, Committee Chair and Shanny Tozzi, Director of Community Relations**

Lois Marino outlined the activities and goals of ChildNet's Community Engagement Committee, focusing on raising awareness, fostering connections, and securing additional funding. The following grants were secured:

- BBX Capital Foundation: \$75,000 over three years for gap funding, covering needs like employee engagement and services not supported by government funds.
- UKG: \$8,000 for educational support, including tutoring.
- Museum of Discovery and Science: In-kind support through vouchers and potential summer internships for children.
- State and County Grants:
 - CAPTA and CBC CAP grants totaling \$450,000 for prevention and family-strengthening programs.
 - Palm Beach County grant for employment coaching and mentorship.
 - Sunshine Health: \$10,000 for housing support and a \$310,000 renewable contract for medical and behavioral health services.

We are actively pursuing other grants, including \$100,000 from Community Foundation of Broward and other potential partnerships. In addition, we are building connections with organizations like Florida Blue and South Florida Business & Wealth for funding and in-kind support.

1. Thanksgiving Drive: Accepting donations until November 18. Focus on providing baskets with non-perishable Thanksgiving meal items (no raw turkeys due to storage limitations; gift cards are suggested for turkey purchases). Approximate cost to provide sides for a family is \$15–\$20.
2. Holiday Toy Drive: Runs until December 13. Focus on toys for children and gift cards for teenagers (preferences like makeup or online store items).
3. Easter Drive: Preparation underway; details to follow.
4. Other Events:
 - Adoption-related events, including National Adoption Day in Palm Beach (November 8) and Broward County (date TBD).
 - Annual Palm Beach Care for Kids Luncheon on March 7, 2025, honoring the Silvestri family (fostered/adopted children). Current sponsorships: \$30,000.
 - Annual Broward Care for Kids Cocktail Event at the Hard Rock Hotel on May 14, 2025, honoring Cindy Ehrenberg Seltzer.
 - TIL Graduation ceremony in June 2025.
5. Internal Celebrations:
 - Thanksgiving Potluck: November 19 (Broward office) and November 21 (Palm Beach office).
 - Holiday celebration on December 12, 2024.
6. Recognition: Larry Rein is receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award at the "Flight Heroes" event on November 1, 2024.

- **Finance Committee – Michael Lepera, Committee Chair and Donna Eprifania, CFO**

Donna Eprifania reported that the committee meeting was cancelled and will be held next month. Spending for the first quarter is on track, but this is largely due to reallocating resources. Residential group care funding is strained: Palm Beach County: 10% over budget and Broward County: 5% over budget. Efforts to reduce the census are making progress and trending positively.



Audit Progress: Preparations for the financial audit are on schedule this year, in contrast to delays experienced last year. All necessary materials have been submitted to the auditors. Currently in the initial testing phase, awaiting reconciliation from the Department of Children and Families, expected within three days. The audit is expected to be ready for review by the Audit Committee and Board before the December 31st submission deadline.

- **Governance/Executive Committee – Rebecca Brock, Committee Chair**

- **Sunsetting of Adolescent Services Committee** – At the Governance meeting, Mr. Rein proposed sunsetting the Adolescent Services Committee and integrating its responsibilities into the Program Quality Committee. This change would involve quarterly sessions within the Program Quality Committee dedicated to teen and adolescent issues, streamlining operations, and reducing the number of separate meetings. Members of the Adolescent Services Committee could still attend these meetings.

A motion was moved and seconded to integrate the Adolescent Services Committee into the Program Quality Committee thereby sunsetting the Adolescent Services Committee. A vote was moved, seconded, and passed unanimously.

- **Board Retreat** - Rebecca Brock announced that the board retreat will take place in person on February 28, 2025. Discussions have focused on topics such as board engagement, and efforts are ongoing to secure a speaker. Ms. Brock assured attendees that the retreat will be engaging, exciting, and inspiring, with Colonel Benjamin leading the initiative. Out of the 17 Board members, 13 stated they can attend in-person, 2 are unable to attend and 2 are unsure.
- **CEO Scorecard Evaluation:** Rebecca Brock introduced the CEO scorecard evaluation, summarizing discussions about Larry Rein's performance. The Board praised Mr. Rein for his exceptional leadership, noting that his self-criticism may be overly harsh given his consistent achievements. The high score he received reflects the Board's appreciation for his efforts in meeting ChildNet's goals, fostering a welcoming environment, and making staff feel valued. Mr. Rein expressed gratitude, highlighting the strong team dynamic between ChildNet's staff and board, emphasizing the board's unprecedented energy and involvement.
- **Membership Recruitment:** Rebecca Brock reported that the Governance Committee approved to move forward for Larry Rein to provide a Board Candidate Application to Dawn Watts. The board is also considering other promising candidates for two Palm Beach vacancies and is optimistic about potentially creating a waiting list for board membership - a positive development for the organization.

- **Program Quality Committee – Nancy W. Stamper, Committee Chair**

At the Committee meeting, discussion was held on the 1st quarter DCF Accountability Metrics presentations for both Broward and Palm Beach. ChildNet is doing well with both state and local requirements.

BOARD CHAIR REPORT – Col. Josefa Benjamin

- **TOA Recipients** – Josefa Benjamin provided an update, highlighting the recognition of the prior month's TOA award recipients, who attended a recent brunch. Ms. Benjamin emphasized the brunch's purpose: honoring case managers and those working daily to make an impact, describing it as successful and meaningful. Gratitude was expressed to board members, team members, and the broader ChildNet family for their support and contributions.



Ms. Benjamin also reflected on ChildNet's growing recognition locally and nationally, as noted in recent meetings where community leaders sought the agency's presence and input. Ms. Benjamin expressed pride in ChildNet's reputation and optimism for its continued positive influence, thanking everyone for their efforts and emphasizing the importance of their work.

CEO/PRESIDENT REPORT – Larry Rein

- **Hurricane Milton Update** – ChildNet experienced minimal impact from Hurricane Milton, with no significant harm to staff or families. However, one young adult sustained minor injuries due to tornado activity in Palm Beach County but is recovering well. In contrast, other parts of the state were more severely affected. ChildNet contributed to relief efforts, including creative solutions like securing gas for the Hillsborough area, led by Donna Eprifania, and participating in a collaborative campaign with other lead agencies. This campaign involved purchasing and delivering supplies to affected areas, including Florida's west coast. The efforts were met with gratitude and showcased the team's commitment to helping those in need.
- **DCF Contract Amendment** - The discussion highlighted challenges with legislative mandates, specifically the Fidelity Bond and Performance Bond requirements in Florida statutes. These mandates are proving difficult, if not impossible, to fulfill in practice. The Department has temporarily removed the Fidelity Bond requirement from the amendment while continuing to explore the feasibility of obtaining a Performance Bond.
- **Forensic Audit/Fiscal Examination** – A Forensic Audit Fiscal Examination required the submission of a corrective action plan. Although ChildNet has not yet received feedback from the Department, updates were provided by the contract manager. The necessary competitive procurement processes for two Palm Beach contracts - independent living services and adoption case management services are underway.
- **CBC Funding Methodology** – The Department of Children and Families (DCF) is working with KPMG to develop a new funding formula for child welfare in Florida. The initial draft indicates potential funding increases for ChildNet - \$2.2 million for Palm Beach and \$3.7 million for Broward. However, it is unclear if these funds will be unrestricted or tied to specific purposes like adoption or independent living subsidies. The model, based largely on historical spending, provides minimal adjustments for geographic costs. While beneficial at first glance, it does not address actual service needs and leaves uncertainty regarding legislative acceptance and potential changes before final submission in December. Eleven of Florida's 15 lead agencies would see funding increases, while four would face reductions. The plan includes a "hold harmless" provision to prevent immediate budget cuts for affected agencies, easing some concerns. Lead agencies are collaborating on an "ideal needs" model to better reflect the true costs of meeting children and families' needs, which they plan to present to the Secretary and legislators soon. While the initial outlook is positive for ChildNet, many questions remain about the model's implications and its final form.
- **Senior Leadership Team Changes** – Mr. Rein reported on the following changes:
 - **New Chief Service Quality Officer Role**: Susan Eby's position of Chief Clinical Quality Officer has been redefined and renamed Chief Service Quality Officer to reflect broader responsibilities, including medical, behavioral health, juvenile justice, education, housing, and workforce. The role's job description has been expanded, and while mental health licensure is preferred, it is no longer a requirement due to existing licensed professionals on the team.
 - **New Chief Legal Officer** - Alcolya St. Juste has joined as Chief Legal Officer, bringing extensive experience in dependency law across various roles. This marks a strategic shift to focus more on



dependency law expertise to better support staff, ensure accountability among legal stakeholders, and improve coordination with other legal entities like Children's Legal Services and Legal Aid.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- There was no public comment.

NEXT MEETING DATE

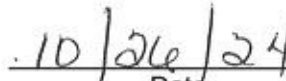
- Friday, November 22, 2024, at 8:00 a.m. in person and via Zoom.

ADJOURNMENT

- Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:40 a.m.



Lois Marino
Board Secretary


Date

(Corporate Seal)