



BOARD MEETING MINUTES

November 21, 2025

Board of Directors:

Col. Josefa Benjamin, Board Chair; Rebecca Brock, Vice Chair; Michael Lepera, Treasurer; Lois Marino, Secretary; Bill Reicherter, Carolina Raineau, Charles Hanna, Donna Korn, Dr. Heidi Schaeffer, Karen Cabrera, Maria Mezerhane, Michael DiBrizzi, Nancy W. Stamper, Paul Adams, Dr. Ronald Ford, Sabria McElroy, Stefanie Title, Dr. Victoria Thurston

Unable to Attend:

Bill Reicherter, Carolina Raineau, Donna Korn, Maria Mezerhane, Michael DiBrizzi, Paul Adams

Other Attendees:

ChildNet Staff: Larry Rein, Neiko Shea, Donna Eprifania, Julie DeMar, Alcolya St. Juste, Rebecca Lindstadt, Shanny Tozzi, Tina Lewis, Deena Ponto, Sheryl Williams, Waverly Edwards, Nayah Allen, Shakema Tucker, Lena Blythe, Lindsay Pierre-Louis, Fiona Evans, Julie Janello, *DCF:* Traci Schweitzer

CALL TO ORDER – Col. Josefa Benjamin, Board Chair

- Col. Josefa Benjamin, Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 8:03 a.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Lois Marino, Board Secretary

- Roll was taken, and quorum was established.

The October 31, 2025 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 – Tina Lewis, HR Officer

- The ChildNet Board Employee Recognition Award was presented to the following deserving employees:
 - October 2025 – Nayah Allen, Lead Dependency Case Manager – Unit E2 (BWD)
Shakema Tucker, Intake & Placement Specialist (PB)

DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

- **Case Management Supervisor Roles** – Julie DeMar, CPO, presented an in-depth overview of the vital role of case management supervisors, outlining their structure, caseloads, and extensive responsibilities in Broward and Palm Beach counties. Ms. DeMar emphasized that supervisors oversee large units of children and are responsible for guiding and supporting case managers, ensuring compliance with safety, permanency, and well-being requirements, approving key assessments and court-related documents, mentoring new staff, and participating in required case staffings. She described supervisors as the backbone of the case management department, essential to driving positive case outcomes. Board members expressed appreciation for the presen-



tation, praised the dedication of supervisors and case managers, discussed the value of shadowing experiences, and highlighted efforts to strengthen supervisor input through regular focus groups.

COMMITTEE UPDATES

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

- The Ripple Effect Fundraising Campaign - Lois Marino and Shanny Tozzi updated the board on the Engagement Committee's progress with *The Ripple Effect* fundraising campaign and the upcoming Ripple Effect Gala on May 9, 2026. They outlined plans to distribute campaign and sponsorship materials to board members, encouraged active board participation through personal outreach, fundraising, and sponsorship engagement, and emphasized the gala as ChildNet's signature fundraising event. Ms. Tozzi explained the easy-to-use fundraising process, the \$2,000 "give or get" goal for board members, and the opportunity for anyone to participate as a fundraiser. She noted that the campaign will run throughout the year, including Giving Tuesday and social media efforts. Ms. Tozzi highlighted early sponsorship support from FPL and reviewed basic event logistics. Ms. Marino concluded by urging board members to actively share the Ripple Effect campaign and gala sponsorship materials within their personal and professional networks, emphasizing the power of individual outreach and collective effort to expand ChildNet's mission and create meaningful community impact.
- Holiday Drive - Shanny Tozzi and Lois Marino shared details about the upcoming Holiday Drive, noting that board members will receive a volunteer schedule and that participation is open to both internal and external volunteers. The drive will run from December 4 – 23, with opportunities to help distribute donated toys to families. Ms. Marino encouraged board members to volunteer not only to assist with the work but also to experience firsthand the impact on families and children.
- Five Element Wellness Center partnering with Born on Purpose – Josefa Benjamin, Board Chair, shared that a December 8 event was created as a direct result of a casual conversation with a personal service provider about ChildNet's mission. Through continued discussions, the provider became engaged and agreed to host a holiday celebration and collect donations on ChildNet's behalf, with a focus on supporting older youth and young adults in foster care. Ms. Benjamin emphasized that this experience demonstrates how effective personal conversations can be in generating community support and encouraged board members to openly share their role with ChildNet within their own networks. Ms. Benjamin concluded by inviting others to attend the 12-08-25 event from 5:00-8:00pm and noted that a flyer would be shared with the board.

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

The Finance Committee is scheduled to meet next week. Donna Eprifania reported that the committee had hoped to review a preliminary external audit earlier, but the process has been delayed due to DCF not yet providing a required reconciliation for Palm Beach County, which is necessary to complete the single audit testing. Ms. Eprifania noted that the external audit draft will be distributed to board members in December for informational purposes and feedback, as it does not require a formal vote to publish but is shared as a best practice. Ms. Eprifania also noted that the financial audit is approximately 97% complete and remains on track to meet the December 31st deadline, pending receipt of the remaining information.

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

- **Discuss Revision to ByLaws** - Rebecca Brock reported on behalf of the Governance Executive Committee regarding proposed revisions to ChildNet's bylaws. Ms. Brock explained that the committee recommended increasing the maximum number of board members from 19 to 25, consisting of up to 24 voting members and one (1) non-voting member, with voting membership evenly divided between Broward and Palm Beach counties. The committee determined that this increase would allow for greater participation without diluting board effectiveness or communication. Alcolya St. Juste, CLO, confirmed that the redlined bylaw changes reflected only this revision and clarified the updated language.

A *motion* was moved and seconded to approve the ByLaws with changes noted on Page 1, Section 2, and Section 3: "The Board of Directors shall consist of no fewer than seven (7) and no more than twenty-five (25) members. Among the voting members of the Board of Directors, an equal number of Directors shall reside in Broward County and Palm Beach County, which together constitute the Company's primary service areas. This residency distribution requirement applies only to voting board members and does not include any non-voting, ex-officio members." A *vote was taken*. The ayes have it and *the motion was adopted*.

- **Quarterly Strategic Plan Update – Quarter 3** - Discussion was held on the 3rd quarter of the 3rd year of the Strategic Plan for 2023 to 2025, a copy of which was provided to the Board members.

- **Goal 1 – Improve and sustain ChildNet's workforce by implementing proven and innovative practices. Evidence of goal progress in Year Three: ChildNet will reduce annual external voluntary turnover to 18%.**

Tina Lewis reported that ChildNet is successfully reducing employee turnover, currently at 17.78%, below the 18% goal. She highlighted third-quarter retention initiatives such as the "Day in the Life" recruitment process, improved training labs for case managers, and a new leadership series for supervisors. Employee engagement has increased, shown by a 93% participation rate in the Gallup survey. She identified personal, family, and compensation issues as main turnover drivers and emphasized ongoing efforts to enhance morale through engagement, wellness, and recognition programs.

- **Goal 2 – Expand the array of appropriate placement and treatment options for children. Evidence of goal progress in Year Three: ChildNet will reduce the percentage of children with stays over 14 days at SafePlace to 25%.**

Dr. Rebecca Lindstadt reported that the Q3 rate stands at 27.2%, slightly above the 25% target. Ongoing efforts to improve include data analysis, collaboration with local committees, judicial training on behavioral health, and pilot programs. New resources such as a female behavioral treatment program and new hires, a kinship licensing supervisor and gap specialist, are supporting case closures. Judicial training is planned for Palm Beach in early 2026, with potential expansion to Broward.

- **Goal 3 – Improve identification and support of kinship caregivers. Evidence of goal progress in Year Three: ChildNet will increase the percentage of children in kinship placements to 62%.**

Julie DeMar reported that kinship placements currently stand at about 51.5%, below the three-year goal of 62%, with better outcomes for younger children than teenagers. Efforts to improve include collaboration with family finding programs, coordination with kinship support

providers, and involvement in Harvard Kennedy School initiatives focused on kinship care challenges and placement disruptions. Intake and placement teams are prioritizing kinship placements to reduce group care and integrating this approach into permanency and reunification efforts. Plans for early 2026 include procuring kinship support services in Broward and piloting programs to provide kinship caregivers with enhanced financial and staffing resources.

- **Gallup Employee Engagement Presentation** – Larry Rein reported strong progress in employee engagement through the Gallup survey, highlighting a remarkable 93% participation rate, far exceeding previous years and initial targets. Overall engagement scores have improved steadily, now well above 4 on a 5-point scale, with consistent improvements across all survey questions. A focused effort on increasing recognition for good work yielded a meaningful boost, though Gallup suggests there is still room to deepen the quality of praise. The organization's engagement level now ranks in the 75th percentile globally compared to similar organizations, with actively engaged employees outnumbering disengaged ones by 8 to 1. Key strengths include access to materials and equipment, while recognition remains an area to enhance. Going forward, action planning will be more closely monitored using Gallup's software, allowing leadership better oversight and consistent progress tracking. The partnership with Gallup will continue to support ongoing engagement efforts.
- **Membership Recruitment** – Larry Rein reported that with the recent approval to increase the board membership size, he will proceed with further discussions with two candidates from Palm Beach County. Previously, a choice between the two was necessary, but now both can be considered.

▪ **Legal/Human Resources Committee – Rebecca Brock, Committee Chair**

Alcolya St. Juste, Chief Legal Officer, reported that during the recent committee meeting, one Level 3 incident was discussed, which is still under review and about which the board was notified via email. The Compliance Committee continues to meet quarterly, now addressing both compliance and risk issues. She also noted that 100% of the board has completed their conflict of interest forms, and employee forms will be distributed next week for completion by year-end to maintain compliance.

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

Nancy Stamper reported that the Program Quality Committee met on November 12th. Larry Rein noted that the overall census of dependent children (birth–18) in both counties remained stable with a slight, insignificant decrease in the first quarter. However, there was a notable 17% increase in child removals in Broward during the first three months of the fiscal year, totaling 29 children, which could become concerning if the trend continues. This increase is linked to removals by DCF investigators and turnover among their executives. Efforts are ongoing to gather more data and monitor the situation. Julie DeMar highlighted positive contract performance in Palm Beach and Broward, exceeding statewide averages on federal and state metrics.

BOARD CHAIR REPORT – Col. Josefa Benjamin

Josefa Benjamin gave a year-in-review, highlighting a phenomenal year overall. Key achievements included completing the board retreat, strong momentum and engagement from the Community Engagement Committee and board members, progress on marketing and branding efforts, and successful integration of events like the Gala. Positive Gallup survey results and strategic plan



advancements were noted as signs of good organizational direction. Ms. Benjamin also praised the team's ability to turn challenges and adverse situations into opportunities for improvement. Finally, reminders were given about upcoming National Adoption Day events in Palm Beach and Broward, encouraging attendance.

CEO/PRESIDENT REPORT – Larry Rein

- **National Issues** – Larry Rein noted a recent positive executive order from the President focused on supporting youth aging out of foster care, especially in technology opportunities. The First Lady's genuine interest and involvement in foster care were noted as key reasons foster care programs have remained stable amid federal changes. Mr. Rein observed the Florida Coalition for Children's new CEO's prominent presence at the signing as a good sign. Locally, Broward and Palm Beach counties have actively supported families during federal benefit interruptions, with county commissioners playing leadership roles. A caution was raised about proposed property tax reductions potentially impacting county governments' ability to serve families, as counties rely heavily on property taxes for funding.
- **Statewide Issues** – Larry Rein reported statewide that the top priority remains the funding model for community-based care. The Department released a draft final report, though missing some final figures, due to be submitted to the legislature by December 1st. ChildNet, along with most lead agencies, supports the model mainly because it proposes a \$110 million statewide funding increase. However, ChildNet raised concerns that the model is based on historical spending rather than actual current or needed costs, which perpetuates funding inequities among lead agencies. For example, ChildNet Broward is slated to receive \$3.4 million of the increase, Palm Beach \$2 million, while some agencies are set to get \$10 to \$17 million more. Another major flaw is that the model penalizes agencies financially if they successfully reduce the number of children served, as it lacks performance incentives to reward reductions in foster care. ChildNet and others have called for more work to address these issues before finalization.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- There was no public comment.

NEXT MEETING DATE

- January 30, 2026 @ 8:00 a.m.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Lois Marino
Board Secretary

01-30-26

Date

(Corporate Seal)