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# BOARD MEETING MINUTES

## February 24, 2023

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### **Board of Directors:**

Amy Black, Board Chair; Victoria Thurston, Vice Chair; Rebecca Brock, Secretary, Meghan Russell, Treasurer, Chelsea Bellew, David Prather, Josefa Benjamin, Joseph Rogers, Lois Marino, Michael Lepera, Nancy Gregoire Stamper, Paul Adams, Ronald Ford, Sabria McElroy, Tom Lukasik

### **Unable to Attend:**

Amy Black, David Prather, Michael Lepera, Tom Lukasik

### **Other Attendees:**

*ChildNet Staff:* Larry Rein, Jason Tracey, Julie DeMar, Susan Eby, Rae Bullard, Shanny Tozzi, Deena Ponto, Nicole Slade, Andrew Wallick, Bobbi Combs, Gevette Gales, Kaydion Watson, Melody Morris, Julie Janello, *DCF:* Elisa Cramer, Teresa Janeczek, Dawn Liberta, Dennis Miles, Jeffrey Ferraro

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### **CALL TO ORDER – Dr. Victoria Thurston, Board Vice Chair**

- Dr. Victoria Thurston, Board Vice Chair, on behalf of Amy Black, Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 8:01 a.m.

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Rebecca Brock, Board Secretary**

- Roll was taken, and quorum was established.  
The January 27, 2023 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.*

### **WELCOME – Dr. Victoria Thurston, Board Vice Chair**

- **New Board Director – Sabria McElroy** - Everyone welcomed Sabria McElroy to ChildNet's Board.

### **CHILDNET BOARD EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AWARD – Rae Bullard, CHRO**

- The ChildNet Board Employee Recognition Award was presented to the following deserving employee:
  - January 2023 – Gevette Gales, Lead Children with Extraordinary Needs (CEN) Specialist

### **ITEMS FOR BOARD REVIEW AND APPROVAL – Dr. Victoria Thurston, Board Vice Chair**

- **Approval of 2023-2025 Strategic Plan** – Larry Rein reported that working with consultant Jim Mueller, leadership came up with specific, quantifiable goals. These 3 goals are long-standing challenges statewide:

Goal One – Improve and sustain ChildNet's workforce by implementing proven and innovative practices.

Goal Two – Expand the array of appropriate placement and treatment options for children.

Goal Three – Improve identification and support of kinship caregivers.

The Strategic Plan is now by calendar year and not by fiscal year.



*A motion was moved and seconded to approve the 2023-2025 Strategic Plan. A vote was taken. The ayes have it and the motion was adopted.*

## **DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW**

- Children with Extraordinary Needs (CEN) Unit – Kaydion Watson, Director of Youth Services – The CEN Unit was designed to address and support children with more challenging needs such as human trafficking involvement, delinquency, behavioral, habitual elopement and mental health challenges. The Unit consists of 5 CEN Specialists, 1 Lead CEN Specialist and 1 Supervisor. The CEN Unit has a smaller caseload size, usually 6-8 cases and a maximum of 10 children per worker. The smaller caseload size allows staff to provide a more hands-on approach and individualized support to each youth. The need is greater for this population of youth, requiring more intense case management. The CEN Specialists are required to make weekly contact with their youth via phone, in-person, or virtually. Within the CEN Unit is the RISE (Restoring Independence, Strength and Empowerment) Court pilot project which focuses directly on 10 youth who are verified victims of human trafficking. These youth are tightly wrapped with services and support to meet their needs. The CEN Unit serves 10 female and 10 male youth. There are 14 youth with DJJ involvement with six of them in DJJ custody. There are 19 youth with mental health diagnosis. There are 16 youth with active child placement agreements (care precaution plan) and eight youth prescribed with psychotropic medications.

Larry Rein reported that 'Children with Extraordinary Needs (CEN)' was taken from Florida Statute about 20 years ago. Approximately 18 years ago at ChildNet, the CEN Unit was created to serve these youth. Working with these youth is quite the challenge for staff. We need to figure out how to better support the staff and what else we can do for the kids that we are serving through the CEN Unit. As part of the Adolescent Services Committee, we will have a close look and involvement of the CEN Unit and figure out how we can modernize it and meet the needs of these kids. A primary challenge now is the increasing number of these very complex youth. In Broward, we have financial resources to expand the program. The challenge is finding the right people (staff and providers) to serve this population. Dr. Thurston asked the question of how we select the youth to be served by the CEN Unit. Deena Ponto, Program Officer, reported that everyone in the agency has the ability to refer a child to the CEN Unit. We do have a waiting list and we look at the most critical youth that are having the most challenging issues at that time that need to be in the CEN Unit for the more intensive case management. We are constantly looking for new and innovative staff to join the unit. We hire staff both internally and externally. Larry Rein noted that incentives are needed to hire the right staff and we need to find more ways to support staff other than monetarily. In addition, liability is, among non-profit organizations throughout the State of Florida, a major barrier to providers serving this population. In ChildNet's attempt in creating more of those model homes like Hope House, we have brought on two new homes in the last several months. Mr. Rein is in discussions with a local provider to put together a partnership to do another home for this population. Joe Rogers noted he would like to serve on the Adolescent Services Committee.

## **FINANCE REPORT – Meghan Russell, Board Treasurer and Donna Eprifania, CFO**

- Meghan Russell reported that the Finance Committee met. A copy of the January 2023 financials and the Biannual Unrestricted Funding Report was provided to the Board. Ms. Russell noted that on the previous Strategic Plan, one of the goals was to have at least a 1% of the total budget in unrestricted funding. We are exceeding that goal. Joe Rogers noted that the numbers on the financials directly point to the increased numbers of complex youth and the increased cost of serving these kids.

## **COMMITTEE UPDATES**

- Community Engagement Committee – Shanny Tozzi, Director of Community Relations  
Shanny Tozzi, Director of Community Relations, reported the following.



- Palm Beach Care for Kids Luncheon – Tuesday, February 28, 2023, 11:00am-1:00pm at Woodfield Country Club in Boca Raton. We are honoring Dr. Heidi Schaeffer. Dr. Schaeffer has invested incredible amounts of time, energy, and money to try to improve foster care in Palm Beach County over the past decade. She is a relentless advocate for neglected, abused and human trafficked children, and a long-time supporter of ChildNet. We are also recognizing Marsh McLennan Agency as our Community Advocate honoree. This is a sold-out event. To date, we have secured \$61,000 between sponsorships and individual tickets, with a headcount of 246 guests, a 12% increase from last year. The silent auction will open Friday, February 24<sup>th</sup> and will close Tuesday, February 28<sup>th</sup> at 12:45pm.
- Broward Care For Kids Cocktail Reception – Thursday, May 11, 2023, 6:00pm-8:00pm at Lauderdale Yacht Club in Fort Lauderdale. We are honoring Melida Akita from Memorial HealthCare System. We currently have \$15,000 in sponsorships and are actively looking to renew last year's sponsorships and introduce new sponsors to this event.

- **Governance Committee – Dr. Victoria Thurston, Committee Chair**

- **Membership Recruitment** – Col. Benjamin is talking with the Palm Beach Sheriff's Office for a possible candidate to join our Board.
- **Provider Representative** – Tom Lukasik terms out his service in April 2023. As part of the selection process for provider representatives, the Governance/Executive Committee will review a list of all subcontracted service providers and ensure that the selected provider representative is from an organization that provides services in both Palm Beach and Broward counties. The Committee will then bring that to the full Board for review and approval. The list will be provided at the next Governance/Executive Committee meeting.
- **ChildNet Board Committee Summary** – Larry Rein noted that we provided an updated list of all Board Committees, current membership, and requirements of membership and is asking the Board to review their participation. Some of the board members do not have a committee assignment. If not on a committee and would like to serve, contact Larry Rein or Amy Black to be appointed to serve on that committee.

The Fundraising Committee was changed to the Community Engagement Committee. Mr. Rein stated that this committee is not just for fundraising but to expand ChildNet's involvement with the community and community support for ChildNet as well. Lois Marino connected Larry Rein to Marcia Barry-Smith, a community advocate. Ms. Barry-Smith is a leader in identifying gaps in housing and ways to fund those gaps for affordable housing. They have had two meetings talking about how we can use potential local funding and organizations to meet the housing needs of our families and for our complex youth.

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

The committee met on 02-06-23 and they discussed adding additional Board members to this committee. ChildNet did not have to retain outside counsel. Risk Management Committee met and reported that ChildNet Broward experienced two level-3 incidences and ChildNet Palm Beach experienced one level-3 incident. Next quarterly meeting scheduled for May 1, 2023.

- **Program Quality Committee – Joe Rogers, Committee Chair**

The committee met on 02-08-23 and were provided a presentation on contract outcomes. On the Census Report, the good news is that the number of children served is on a decline. We are at the lowest number



in Palm Beach since 2013-2014 and Broward is at the lowest number they ever had. Total number of children has decreased but total number of teenagers has increased.

## CONTINUING BUSINESS

- ChildNet's Anti-Racism Workgroup Update – Sheryl Williams reported that the Workgroup celebrated Black History month and shared information throughout the month about notable Black Americans and events that took place in Black History. We sent out Black History weekly trivia that included 3-4 questions for staff participation. A random selection from the staff with correct answers was provided a gift card. We had a Wheel of Fortune-Black History Edition with staff participation. The Wheel of Fortune finale had a ChildNet celebrity guest who was Donna Eprifania. Had two discussions on a Hulu Series entitled “The 1619 Project”. The Workgroup is refocusing our goals and focusing on developing new goals for the year. The group reviewed the Black Haircare Guide they created two years ago and will be revamping it. In addition, they will be working on the parent surveys, and have ongoing recruitment efforts for more workgroup members.

## CEO/PRESIDENT REPORT – Larry Rein

- Rally in Tally – the Florida Coalition for Children (FCC)'s annual Rally in Tally coalesces with their legislative agenda for the coming year. The FCC agenda is seeking an increase of statewide child welfare funding of \$35 million this year. Some CBCs are still having financial difficulties even after the \$150 million received last year. At least three CBCs still have very significant challenges.
- Special Appropriations – we have two (2) Special Appropriation Requests for Palm Beach:
  - 1) Oak Street Program - Replicate Oak Street Program for 4 of the most complex teenage girls in Palm Beach. Representative Caruso and Senator Powell are sponsoring this request.
  - 2) Parent Engagement Program – Intensive focused case management and support program for parents whose children have been removed due to the parents' substance abuse challenges. This is not an evidence-based model, but a model geared to meeting the specific needs of these families. A key piece of this is we will extend it beyond just reunification to continue to support that reunification and help families should they relapse and not have to remove child(ren) again. The industry standard goal for successful discharge is at 51%. We are hopeful that this intensive approach will help up exceed this goal. Senator Berman and Representative Silver are sponsoring this request.
- Sheriff's Offices - The Department of Children & Families announced last Friday that they made a decision to seek legislative approval to terminate the relationship and involvement of the seven (7) sheriff's offices in the State of Florida who do Child Protective Investigations and revert responsibility for those investigations to DCF. ChildNet will definitely miss the relationship it has with the Broward Sheriff's Office. Mr. Rein feels it will be a very difficult transition. DCF needs statutory change to make this happen. If approved by legislation, transition will take place October 1, 2023.

Dennis Miles noted that when he speaks at a Board or other meetings, he addresses ChildNet from the standpoint of performance. When he speaks of ChildNet, it is invariably extremely positive as they are one of the top performing lead agencies in the State. Mr. Miles noted that the next comments are not directed at performance. As they look at ChildNet and their continued development as an organization, they have become so detail-oriented, with so much community and legislative engagement, their relationship that Mr. Rein is building with the Department and the lead role that Mr. Rein takes with the Florida Coalition for Children, just really led to a very professionally run organization. Mr. Miles commends everyone, leadership and staff, at ChildNet and noted that the oversight and governance from the Board is very impressive.



- **Funding Formula** – DCF has engaged Mercer to come up with a new funding formula. Mercer held focus groups with lead agencies. DCF's expectation was to have a report for the current legislative session. The Mercer Report is still in process and will not have a report until September 2023. The challenge is that the Department's desire, based on the way the Agency for Healthcare Administration operates, is to structure something that would be a "per member/per month" payment formula. Mr. Rein expressed ChildNet's concerns about such an approach. The 'per member/per month' approach may make sense in the healthcare field, but it is very different for child welfare. Healthcare organizations, when they operate on a per member/per month approach, it behooves them to get more members. We do not want more members. We do not want to have to lose money because we are doing a good job of preventing families from coming into our care or by reunifying timely so that we decrease our numbers. There is a fundamental problem here. Mercer understands the issues. They also understand just how costly the right services will be to serve these complex youth. The Department is saying that Mercer needs to continue to get data from us to better understand what our costs are. The fear is that whatever the formula is could lead to taking away monies. ChildNet has a surplus or carry-forward not because we are getting tremendous amounts of money but because we have reduced the number of children in care. We cannot penalize lead agencies or communities for decreasing the number of children in dependency.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

- There was no public comment.

#### **NEXT MEETING DATE**

- The next Board Meeting is scheduled for Friday, March 24, 2023 in person and via Zoom.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

- Having no further business, a *motion* was moved to adjourn the meeting. A *vote was taken*. The eyes have it and *the motion was adopted*. The meeting was adjourned at 9:24 a.m.

Rebecca Brock  
Board Secretary

Date

(Corporate Seal)