



BOARD MEETING MINUTES

March 22, 2024

Board of Directors:

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

Unable to Attend:

Chelsea Bellew, Josefa Benjamin, Maria Mezerhane, Mark Dhooge, Meghan Russell

Other Attendees:

ChildNet Staff: Larry Rein, Neiko Shea, Donna Eprifania, Jason Tracey, Julie DeMar, Susan Eby, Deena Ponto, Nicole Slade, Sheryl Williams, Shanny Tozzi, Tina Lewis, Lisa Rowe, Tara Collins, Shavon Rahming, Dawn Warfle, Brittany Ceasar, Jerome Williams, Wiline Profil, Julie Janello, *Courts:* Judge Kathleen Kroll, *DCF:* Teresa Janeczek, Isis Williams, Traci Schweitzer

CALL TO ORDER – Dr. Victoria Thurston, Vice Chair

- Amy Black, Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Rebecca Brock, Board Secretary

- Roll was taken, and quorum was established.

The February 20, 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:
 - January 2024 – Lisa Rowe, Office Supervisor, Case Management (Bwd)
 - February 2024 – Brittany Ceasar, DCM Supervisor, Unit A3 (Bwd)
Jerome Williams, Dependency Case Manager, Unit 106 (PB)

ITEMS FOR BOARD REVIEW AND APPROVAL – Amy Black, Board Chair

- **Board Candidate – Bill Reicherter** - Larry Rein and Amy Black met with Mr. Reicherter who plans to run for the state Senate. Dr. Heidi Schaeffer introduced Mr. Reicherter. They both feel that Mr. Reicherter would be a tremendous asset to the Board.

A motion was moved and seconded to approve Bill Reicherter as the newest member of the Board of Directors. *A vote was taken.* The ayes have it and *the motion was adopted.*



DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

- **Intake & Placement Department** – Julie DeMar, Chief Program Officer, discussed the crucial role of Intake and Placement staff in the child welfare system, particularly focusing on their responsibilities in the initial stages of a child's removal and placement in foster care. They gather information about children, create profiles for potential foster parents or group homes, coordinate placements, and facilitate communication between various parties involved. Additionally, they oversee transportation, organize meetings, and address stability concerns in placements. In Broward County, there is an emphasis on licensing kinship placements, and both counties prioritize educational support for children in care, including regular meetings with school districts to address challenges and ensure academic success.

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

- Donna Eprifania reported the Finance Committee meeting is scheduled for next week. At the February 2024 committee meeting, they discussed the progress of the annual financial and single audit, with the audit nearing completion by the March 20th deadline. The Audit Committee is currently reviewing the financial component, with single audit testing ongoing. The meeting also covered insurance renewal preparations and projected second-quarter finances, highlighting areas of concern such as residential group care spending in Palm Beach County. There were positive updates, including receiving a Great Charity Challenge grant and applying for additional grants to support family services. Additionally, a contract with the Department of Juvenile Justice was finalized to fund a small census group home, providing some financial relief. Plans for a new group home in Palm Beach County were also discussed, though it will take time to become operational.

COMMITTEE UPDATES

- **Adolescent Services Committee** – Col. Josefa Benjamin, Committee Chair

Susan Eby reported caseloads and staffing trends were reviewed along with quarterly data. The committee observed a decrease in Baker Acts and arrests among children assigned an Adolescent Care Coordinator, compared to those without one. Placement stability was also discussed, noting a slight increase. There was an emphasis on the need to improve academic engagement and employment opportunities for teens, with plans to apply for funding to hire employment specialists. Despite challenges, the committee expressed appreciation for the impactful work being done and discussed strategies for expansion. Additionally, discussions revolved around the challenges of finding suitable staff for these positions, but it was reported that all five positions have now been filled.

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

The recent meeting highlighted key action items identified by the committee to better serve children and families. These included creating ambassador cards to define ChildNet's mission, fundraising goals, and distinguishing factors from other service organizations. The committee also emphasized the need to identify available grants and sponsorship opportunities to increase funding for flexible use, such as incentives for adolescents and family support. Additionally, discussions centered on refining ChildNet's message to focus on child safety and family support, with plans for a potential board retreat to further develop this messaging. Various partnerships and support opportunities, including connections with the Community Foundation and involvement with organizations like the Dolphins, were also mentioned as avenues for support and engagement.



- 9th Annual Broward Care for Kids Cocktail Reception – Wednesday, May 22, 2024 is honoring Kip Hunter and Joey Epstein. This year we will be having tables.

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

- **Resignation of David Prather** – It was noted, for the Minutes, that David Prather resigned from ChildNet's Board effective 12-31-23.
- **Membership Recruitment** – Larry Rein reported that there is one applicant in process in Palm Beach.

- **Program Quality Committee – Nancy Gregoire Stamper, Committee Chair**

Nancy Stamper provided updates from the Committee meeting, focusing on policy changes related to Sunshine Health contract and foster home recruitment. Neiko Shea, Chief of Staff, elaborated on compliance updates, including mandatory fraud, waste, and abuse training for all employees and board members, as well as new requirements for background screenings.

CONTINUING BUSINESS

- **ChildNet's Anti-Racism Workgroup Update** – Sheryl Williams noted the workgroup will meet next week.

BOARD CHAIR REPORT – Amy Black

- Amy Black reported that discussions continue on the Board Officer Slate for FY 2024-2025. Ms. Black also encouraged new Board Directors to select committees in which to serve.

CEO/PRESIDENT REPORT – Larry Rein

- **Introduction** – Larry Rein reported that Rae Bullard, who served as the Chief Human Resources Officer, and who modernized ChildNet's HR practices, has transitioned out. Tina Lewis was appointed as the new Director of Human Resources and oversees all HR operations. In addition, ChildNet recently held a successful Spring Picnic, recognizing staff members who have been with the organization for over 20 years.
- **Dennis Miles** – Larry Rein reported that Dennis Miles, who served as the local leader of the Department of Children and Families in Broward and Palm Beach County for about 12 years, had tendered his resignation to the Secretary of the Department of Children and Families. Mr. Miles' departure is seen as a significant loss for both ChildNet and the communities we serve. As of now, there is no information available regarding a replacement or the Department's plans to move forward.
- **ITN** – Larry Rein reported that ChildNet submitted its application to become the lead agency in Broward and Palm Beach counties, with no competitors for either county. This lack of competition reflects the challenging nature of the business and the reluctance of outside organizations to take on such responsibilities. The only competitive procurement occurred in the Orlando area due to the current lead agency's intention to end their contract. ChildNet's next step involves an initial negotiation session with the Department of Children and Families, primarily focusing on answering questions about their proposal and business operations. The negotiation does not involve financial aspects, and any changes to the existing contract will be discussed in a more private setting than a



public board meeting. This approach aims to maintain confidentiality and ensure that sensitive negotiation details are managed appropriately.

- Legislative Session – The discussion revolved around Senate Bill 356 and House Bill 1065, which addressed various aspects of how community-based care lead agencies operate. These bills included provisions related to conflicts of interest penalties for board members, term limitations on contracts, and exemptions for providing more than 35% of direct child welfare services. ChildNet successfully opposed the conflicts of interest penalties and contract term limitations, ensuring their removal from the final bill. Additionally, the legislation threatened funding for lead agencies, with no increases allocated in the budget and no back-of-the-bill funding for agencies projecting deficits. Despite these challenges, ChildNet secured approval for special local appropriations for specific programs in Palm Beach County and we are now awaiting the Governor’s approval.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- There was no public comment.

NEXT MEETING DATE

- Friday, April 26, 2024, at 8:00 a.m. in person and via Zoom.

ADJOURNMENT

- Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:50 a.m.

Rebecca Brock
Board Secretary

5-1-24

Date

(Corporate Seal)