



BOARD MEETING MINUTES

March 24, 2023

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, Meghan Russell, Nancy Gregoire Stamper, Ronald Ford

Other Attendees:

ChildNet Staff: Larry Rein, Donna Eprifania, Jason Tracey, Julie DeMar, Susan Eby, Rae Bullard, Nicole Slade, Andrew Wallick, Yyone Cowan, Andrea Chenet, Brittany Burnette, Julie Janello, *DCF:* Dawn Liberta, *Judiciary:* Judge Kathleen Kroll

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 8:02 a.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Rebecca Brock, Board Secretary

- Roll was taken, and quorum was established.
The February 24, 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.*

CHILDNET BOARD EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AWARD – Rae Bullard, CHRO

- The ChildNet Board Employee Recognition Award was presented to the following deserving employees:
 - February 2023 – Andrea Chenet, Director of CQI and Krista Beekmann, Quality Manager

DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

- Revenue Maximization – Yyone Cowan, Director of Revenue Maximization – The Revenue Maximization Department (Rev Max) looks at a snapshot at removal. Before Rev Max Initial Coordinators input anything into the state database, which is FSFN, they research demographic information in the DCF/Florida system and other state data information systems, including citizenship/legal resident status, SSN welfare enumeration, earned/unearned income, absent parent information, Social Security income or death benefits. After doing this research, the Coordinators complete the Title IV-E Medicare Application in FSFN. The Rev Max Department's main function is to earn and draw down Title IV-E federal dollars to provide some services, pay for room and board, administrative costs, training dollars and salary. The foster care programs they work with are Levels 1-5 and with the Extended Foster Care population. They do eligibility for the Guardianship Assistance Program and children in out-of-home care. They also process Medicaid. Title IV-E and Medicaid come together, and the worksheet is generated in FSFN. This reduces medical costs to ChildNet. Each Rev Max Coordinator is assigned to specific case management and adoption units. They attend Unit meetings to share processes and make connections.



Connections improve notifications of placement changes. They use internal logs and automated notifications to aide in the process of annual recertification. Adoption Eligibility Screening is provided for applicable and non-applicable children. There are three funding sources for children placed for adoption, 1) MAS/TANF, 2) Title IV-E and 3) General Revenue. The Unit includes a Director and Regional Supervisor along with 8 staff in Broward and 4 staff in Palm Beach. Donna Eprifania noted that every time a child is removed, eligibility must take place, so every child in out-of-home care has this process which must be done every year to ensure that we are drawing down the right resources from the right funding. This is the vehicle in which children are afforded their Medicaid.

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

- Donna Eprifania reported that the Finance Committee met. Ms. Eprifania noted that discussion was held on our recent amendments that DCF executed with ChildNet, and on our anticipated on-site review that is scheduled for April 25-27, 2023. The highlights on the February 2023 financials were that we need to continue to keep our eye on residential group care numbers as they continue to increase, which is starting to put a stress on the budget. In Broward, we still have a healthy balance of roll forward that we are relying on which gives us an opportunity to continue to expand our small census group homes. In Palm Beach, on top of the initial approved deficit budget in amount of \$600,000, we are adding stressors with the responsibility of supporting our current SafePlace provider with staff as ChildNet transitions to a new provider. The current SafePlace provider gave notice at the end of February 2023; we are now working with Lutheran Services to stand them up for potential May 1st start date. Those two things are stressing the budget and have put us in a posture where we will be asking DCF for back-of-bill funding this legislative session.

Larry Rein reiterated that we had subcontracted with Florida United Methodist Children's Home to run SafePlace in Palm Beach. Last summer, they had tremendous challenges with their workforce and keeping it staffed. ChildNet then ran the shelter for about three months using staff from ChildNet from both the Broward and Palm Beach offices. In February 2023, FUMH gave notice that they cannot continue to run SafePlace. Lutheran Services does shelter care and will now run SafePlace in Palm Beach.

Mr. Rein also reported that a statewide stressor is the residential group care and residential group care rates. Our number is elevated in Palm Beach. A year ago, our numbers were down to 80 and we are now over 100 children in residential group care. Reimbursement rates for group care providers, throughout the state, rose dramatically approximately 1-2 years ago when the Department got involved in approving and setting standard rates. There was a lot of confusion when there was the transition to the federal legislation, Families First Preservation Services Act, and what the impact would be on that in terms of federal match for residential group care across the nation. Out of concern, the Department got much more involved in seeing what those rates were and ensuring that they were justifiable to the feds for match or reimbursement down the road. As a result, however, those rates rose dramatically and everyone in the state is experiencing that challenge. Therefore, several agencies are working with the Florida Coalition for Children (FCC) and the Department to hopefully have the legislature provide back of bill funding to fill gaps in this year's budget. ChildNet has submitted a request.

COMMITTEE UPDATES

- **Adolescent Services Committee – Col. Josefa Benjamin & Lois Marino**

Lois Marino reported that the Committee met on March 17, 2023. The committee is gathering a lot of information and is starting to get good data so that we have the proper information to serve this population. Susan Eby noted that we are fully staffed and all 15–16-year-olds in out-of-home licensed care have been assigned to an Adolescent Care Coordinator (ACC) to begin engagement. Most of the ACC's are assigned caseloads of 30-35. Andrea Chenet, Director of Continuous Quality Improvement and her team created a monthly status report in the portal so ACC's can more easily aggregate data.



This was the first month we have used the portal. Some of the things we are looking at are runaway episodes, Baker Acts, number of arrests, what services the children are receiving, and if people are visiting the youth regularly. We are looking at things we think will contribute to long-term pro-social activities and behaviors. An Adolescent Care Coordinator (ACC) works with assigned youth, not the entire family like a Dependency Case Manager would.

Success Stories – In Broward, we have a 15-year-old female in care for nearly 3 years. She would not remain in placement overnight, engage in services, or attend school and habitually smoked marijuana. Within the past month working with her ACC, she has not had any runaway episodes, completed multiple service-based assessments and requested to return to school. In Palm Beach, we have a 15-year-old female in care for 13 months. She had significant DJJ involvement with minimal school attendance. Within the past month working with her ACC, she has obtained employment, completed her permit course and is attending school regularly.

Larry Rein noted that last year, ChildNet created a pilot project to look at 20 of the most challenging and complex teenagers in both counties. Brittany Burnette, Lead Adolescent Care Coordinator, was the staff assigned to run this project, which involved a thorough and intensive look at all the services that the teenagers were receiving. One of the things that we learned is that Brittany's involvement with these kids, in addition to normal case management, made a difference to many of the teenagers. This led us to the next step in expanding the project to now have a team to work with these teenagers. The ACC's report to Ms. Burnette. These youth are so complex, their challenges so imposing, and their stories so concerning that having these two (2) successes stories is amazing.

Question was asked if these teenagers have mentors, i.e., Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Ms. Burnette noted that there are not a lot of mentors but life coaches. A part of the ACC's responsibility is to ensure each youth is connected to life coaching. Mr. Rein noted that young people that have had life coaches speak highly of them. We have been concentrating to ensure that these youth get linked to life coaches where that is available and/or mentors. In Broward, the Children's Services Council funds life coaches. In Palm Beach, there is a funding from Children's Services Council and United Way, a more robust mentorship program.

- **Community Engagement Committee – Shanny Tozzi, Director of Community Relations**

Shanny Tozzi, Director of Community Relations, reported the following.

1. The Palm Beach Care For Kids Luncheon took place on February 28, 2023 at Woodfield Country Club in Boca Raton. We honored Dr. Heidi Schaeffer and had a fantastic, motivated and engaging speaker with Twiler Smith. ChildNet raised \$87,000, 26% over last year. It was a sold-out event with 246 guests in attendance. Thank you to those that attended and/or supported this luncheon.
2. The Broward Care For Kids Cocktail Reception is scheduled for Thursday, May 11, 2023 at the Lauderdale Yacht Club starting at 6:00pm. We are honoring Melida Akita from Memorial HealthCare System and a former Board Chair. We currently have \$35,000 in sponsorships and are actively looking to renew last year's sponsorships and introduce new sponsors to this event. Our goal for this event is \$100,000.
3. Broward and Palm Beach Graduation Ceremonies are being planned for June 2023. These graduation ceremonies bring together our children that are graduating from high school and/or college. AT&T has expressed an interest in providing computers to those kids continuing their education and I am in conversations with Coca Cola and other organizations for sponsorships to be able to fund the ceremonies. We need to raise \$20,000 to cover the ceremonies. This is a great opportunity for individuals and companies that can afford \$500-\$1000 donations and want to join ChildNet in celebrating these children.
4. Easter Basket Drive - We are receiving Easter Basket donations in both offices.



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

The Governance/Executive Committee did not meet. The next meeting is scheduled for April 18, 2023.

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

The committee met on 03-08-23 and were provided a presentation on the 2nd quarter DCF Data Report which has 11 to 12 different criteria. ChildNet continues to perform strong. The second presentation was on the Foster Parent Survey. Larry Rein highlighted the Foster Parent Survey. Mr. Rein stated that he spoke at the Foster Parent Association meeting this past month. He received great feedback from the foster parents that they are making good use of these surveys to express what their concerns are. We are getting great information about challenges in both counties, and, in addition, when a concern is brought up, the ChildNet team follows up and addresses the concern.

CONTINUING BUSINESS

- **ChildNet's Anti-Racism Workgroup Update** – Nicole Slade reported that the workgroup is working on four initiatives, 1) Length of Stay Project, 2) Family Finding, 3) Parent Engagement, and 4) launching Youth Council in Palm Beach. We are also relaunching the Black Hair flyer. Workgroup is also discussing plans for Juneteenth this year.

CEO/PRESIDENT REPORT – Larry Rein

- **Census** – Overall, the number of children in care in both counties continues to decrease slowly. The number in Broward is the lowest it has ever been. The number in Palm Beach is the lowest it has been in the 10 years that ChildNet has been in Palm Beach. The challenges, however, are an increase in the use of group care and the number of teenagers in care. The number of teenagers in Broward grew substantially last year and the number of teenagers in Palm Beach is similarly increasing this year. When there are more teenagers there is typically more reliance on group care. One of ChildNet's three goals of its new Strategic Plan is to increase the array of options for the most complex children in our care, predominately the teenage population. Beyond our direct control is that much of the funding for placements, treatment and therapy for children in care is the responsibility of the Agency for Healthcare Administration (AHCA) which operates Medicaid in the State of Florida, and its subcontracted managed care organization, Sunshine Health. Mr. Rein is a member of Sunshine Health's Advisory Board. Sunshine Health's Vice President over their foster care plan, agrees with Mr. Rein that the creation of an adequate and appropriate array of treatment options for complex children in care should be a major priority going forward. It is going to take advocacy with Sunshine Health and AHCA. The Florida Coalition for Children (FCC) is gathering data for the Department to more clearly show what our needs are, which includes children waiting for placement into residential treatment centers (SIPPS), therapeutic group care, and therapeutic foster care.
- **Oak Street** – We continue to see success with our model, originally started in Palm Beach with Oak Street, of serving 4 teenaged males with complex needs. We just prepared data for our legislative budget request to expand the program. We continue to show substantial decreases in children in those homes in terms of being arrested, substantial increases in school attendance and increases in grade point averages. We have a Special Legislative Request to expand, in Palm Beach, by creating a home for 4 teenaged girls with complex needs. In Broward, we opened two homes with One Hope United which are experiencing this same success. We are in the process of adding one home with Avidity and one home with Project Touch (for girls). We have recently had a couple of additional providers express some interest in opening these types of homes as well.
- **Legislative Update** – the legislature is in session and so far, nothing dramatic in terms of child welfare legislation. As reported last meeting, the Department is requesting the legislature allow them to take on child protective investigations in the seven (7) counties where the sheriff's offices are handling those investigations.



A meeting has been scheduled with DCF leadership and Broward stakeholders to discuss the transition from the Broward Sheriff's Office (BSO) to the Department. Mr. Rein invited the Children's Services Council of Broward to that meeting as they fund \$9 million in family strengthening prevention services that BSO has historically accessed to keep families together and children at home. Mr. Rein is confident in the Department's ability to do protective investigations but concerned about the challenge of staffing and having an adequate and full workforce during this transition.

On the fiscal level at the legislature, the Florida Coalition for Children (FCC) is working on two requests:

- 1) Back of Bill Funding to fill in deficits of six lead agencies including ChildNet Palm Beach.
- 2) An overall \$35 million increase in child welfare funding to account for the costs and gaps created by inflation.

Mr. Rein attended a meeting of the Senate Committee that does appropriations for Health and Human Services and there was a mixed response from that committee. Gail Harrell, Committee Chair, is a strong supporter of foster care and community-based care. There is one committee member that feels that the \$150 million sent to CBC's last year should have been sufficient. However, the vast majority of that \$150 million went to CBCs in tremendous need. It did not go to ChildNet Broward, but ChildNet Palm Beach received \$2.75 million. We continue advocating.

Mr. Rein wants the Board to be aware that there is a trend, which started with the last administration of the Department, for DCF to try to take on more and be more actively involved in the child welfare system in Florida. Taking investigations back from the sheriff's offices is clear evidence of that. They have also ended a contract for in-service training with several Florida universities and brought that in-house. They are also getting more involved in the licensing of foster homes and, potentially, reimbursement rates for foster parents.

Early on in community-based care, we agreed with the Department, and put into Florida Statute and Administrative Code, something called the Attestation Model. Child placing agencies and foster home management agencies recruit, train and license foster parents. As part of that process, they submit to the lead agencies all of the licensing materials which the lead agencies then approve, attest to its quality, and submit to the Department, which remains the entity that actually issues the license. According to the Attestation Model, if the lead agency attests to the quality, the Department will issue the license. This process has been in place for 15-18 years. To ensure quality, the Department would randomly review files or applications to ensure they were done correctly. This eliminated duplication and reduced the time to licensing. In the last several months, the Department has begun reviewing every single application again. This puts tremendous time demands on their staff and delays the process.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- There was no public comment.

NEXT MEETING DATE

- The next Board Meeting is scheduled for Friday, April 28, 2023 in person and via Zoom.

ADJOURNMENT

- Having no further business, a *motion* was moved to adjourn the meeting. A *vote was taken*. The ayes have it and *the motion was adopted*. The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 a.m.

Rebecca Brock
Board Secretary

5/10/23

Date

(Corporate Seal)