



BOARD MEETING MINUTES

March 27, 2020 (Rev. 08-19-20)

Board of Directors:

Sigrid McCawley, Board Chair; Michael Lepera, Vice Chairman; Christopher Cade, Treasurer; Amy Black, Secretary, Jillian Smath, Joe Rogers, **Josefa Benjamin**, Melida Akiti, Rebecca Brock, Sigrid McCawley, Tex Guignard, Victoria Thurston

Unable to Attend:

Armando Fana, Christopher Cade, Josefa Benjamin, Melida Akiti, Tex Guignard, Victoria Thurston

Other Attendees:

ChildNet Staff: Larry Rein, Donna Eprifania, Dionne Wong, Julie DeMar, Susan Eby, Sheryl Williams, Deena Ponto, Andrea Cunningham, Julie Janello, *DCF:* Dawn Liberta, Teresa Janeczek

CALL TO ORDER – Sigrid McCawley, Board Chair

- Sigrid McCawley, Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 8:01 a.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Amy Black, Secretary

- Roll was taken and quorum was not established. The February 28, 2020 Minutes will be reviewed at the April 2020 Board meeting.

COVID-19 Update – Larry Rein, CEO and President

- Larry Rein noted that the overall response to this emergency by ChildNet staff, providers, DCF, and by CBCs everywhere is remarkable. Everyone is focused on remaining safe and healthy but also remembering that we are in the business of preventing child abuse and protecting children. Everyone is moving forward calmly and cohesively in this hectic environment. Within ChildNet, we are communicating with all staff in a variety of ways. The Senior Management team has a daily conference call at 11:00am. In addition, the “Emergency Response Team”, consisting of 42 staff that includes senior staff, directors and managers, has a daily conference call at 3:00pm. Then every evening, Mr. Rein sends out an update email to all staff.

There has been substantial and constant communication statewide by both the Florida Coalition for Children (FCC) and Department of Children & Families (DCF). Twice a week, ChildNet is included in a conference call convened by DCF and also included in a conference call convened by the FCC in which the DCF Secretary also participates.

The two major issues with child welfare in the State of Florida are: 1) the challenges of visiting children on a monthly basis, as required by Florida statute, and 2) having court-ordered visits between parents and children and siblings.

DCF has issued guidance on the issue of home visits and essentially said to each CBC to develop a plan to assess the risk to children and then determine how each CBC is to proceed on those visits. Each CBC is allowed to do visits by video and teleconference. ChildNet has developed our plan and identified five (5) categories of children that we feel have sufficient safety concerns that for them we



are still going to have staff do face-to-face visits every 30 days, as long as no one in the home has the virus. For everyone else, we are doing video visits. For all of those children and all of the children we are seeing face-to-face, instead of just monthly, we are doing video and telephonic contact on a weekly basis. The technology is allowing us to have more contact with the children.

Julie DeMar reported that each child advocate completes a “Remote Visitation Form” that walks them through the safety, permanency and well-being topics each week. Child Advocates have conversations with each child separately, as best as possible. They also have conversations with the caregiver about their stress-level, identifies any service needs the family may have, and assesses the home to see if there are any changes or new people in the household. For little children and non-verbal children, we engage in body checks as best as we can, although assisted by the caregiver. There is a very clear format to complete the weekly contacts.

There are six (6) criteria to determine which children fall into the five (5) categories of children that we feel has sufficient safety concerns to continue to have face-to-face:

- 1) Children with an active present danger safety plan.
- 2) Children that are part of an impending danger safety plan.
- 3) Children ages 0-5 who are reunified with parents within last 90 days.
- 4) Children ages 0-5 who are part of a new in-home case.
- 5) Children removed due to physical abuse or injury and currently placed back in the home with the abuser removed.
- 6) Children at home with any developmental disabilities or special needs that impede all ability to communicate effectively.

All caseloads were pulled in both Broward and Palm Beach, and using the six criteria above, it was determined that there are approximately 200 face-to-face visits in each county that we will continue on an ongoing basis. For these face-to-face visitations, if there are no indications of anyone being exposed to the virus at those homes, the case management staff are going into the home while maintaining social distancing. ChildNet has removed the requirement of passing the phone around obtaining everyone’s signatures, and instead has the child advocate take pictures which will capture the GPS that they were in the home. We are also having the caregivers and children assist themselves in body checks so that our staff does not have to engage in physical contact. If anyone in the home is ill, we are then doing the virtual visit and doing a check-in every couple of days. We also have the ability to conduct these visits on the porch, in the lawn, etc. However, these visits will be noted as a field visit, not a home visit. In addition, staff can pick-up wipes and gloves from either office to assist with maintaining sanitization.

In all the administrative orders issued by local and state leadership ChildNet falls into the exempt category as a social service organization that is serving disadvantaged and needy populations. ChildNet is considered an essential organization and thus continuing full operations. Today, we are finalizing a letter to send to all staff for them to show to people who may ask why they are working instead of staying at home.

Regarding the court ordered visits with parents and children, that is something that DCF could not directly change. Each circuit is handling that issue differently. In Palm Beach, the Chief Administrative Judge has issued an Administrative Order that suspends prior orders regarding visitation and enables us to facilitate those visitations through video means. In Broward, the Administrative Order is slightly more complex. If we believe there are reasons that we need to facilitate a video visit between parents, we are now able to do so. We had been making requests through the Office of the Attorney General for modification of the visitation orders, but an email last



evening stated that we no longer need to do that. The attorneys for the parents do have the option of objecting under those circumstances.

FINANCE REPORT – Chris Cade, Treasurer/Finance Chair and Donna Eprifania, CFO

- Donna Eprifania reported that the Finance Committee meeting was postponed due to responding to all of the dynamics as it relates to the coronavirus.

Ms. Eprifania reported that we had a staff member that was being tested that had been in the ChildNet office within the two prior weeks. As a result of that knowledge, ChildNet made the decision to deploy its workforce remotely within a 72-hour period. We disbursed 50 laptops in Broward and 3 in Palm Beach so that there would be a continuity of service to ChildNet clients. In addition, we addressed the work environment in both buildings; they were sanitized from top to bottom including the cleaning of carpets.

Larry Rein noted that ChildNet is open and operating. Nearly all staff are operating remotely; however, both buildings are open with a skeleton crew that includes some financial staff to cut checks and handle financial activities, and Intake and Placement staff, as children are still being removed. The majority of new children have been placed with relatives or in other placements. Currently, none have been placed in SafePlace. All new children in the system still have to get a 72-hour health screening.

Ms. Eprifania continued the finance discussion noting that as all staff are actively working, payroll and accounts payable activities continue to be processed as they have historically been done. ChildNet is in a fortunate situation in that the revenue stream that we receive is not being affected by the overarching pandemic. We are submitting our monthly invoices to the Department and receiving the same distribution on a monthly basis to ensure that we preserve business continuity.

During the first week of working remotely, the finance department ensured that there were no disruptions to our families who receive direct payment. There are three groups that we traditionally support financially: 1) Foster Care – Level 1, relatives that we have recently licensed and Level 2, traditional foster parents, 2) Independent Living – youth in extended foster care or participating in post educational secondary services, and 3) the Adoption population. We were able to maintain the distribution of those funds to all those groups in a remote environment. In all total there was approximately 6,000 individuals that received payments.

During our communication with many of these individuals, we received some requests that we move up some of the payment timelines. A decision was made that rather than trying to support a large group of people individually, we are going to approach it like we have provided annual clothing allowances. We will disburse a stipend to all of the Level 1 & Level 2 licensed care. The approach we are taking can be reimbursed by DCF. In a conference call with DCF this week, discussion was held on which buckets of money we could use to support these one-time payments. It was identified that some of these actions can in fact be supported with federal Title IV-E dollars instead of using the carry-forward surplus we generated from prior years. This approach will give us visibility in case we have future FEMA reimbursement opportunities that the state can receive. We will have a direct pool of funds that we disburse directly to our caregivers and will set it up to be called 'COVID-19 placement stability'. The breakdown of dollar amounts is noted below (these are one-time payments):



FOSTER GROUP

Broward – total 548 children receiving \$300 stipend - \$164,400

Palm Beach – total 388 children receiving \$300 stipend - \$116,400

These dollars are the same dollars we use to support current placements; there is no extra demand on the budget. These funds will provide financial stability.

Mr. Rein noted that statewide one of the biggest concerns going forward is having sufficient capacity in terms of foster parents to serve continuing removals. Therefore, anything that we can do to proactively support foster parents will help us maintain that capacity.

INDEPENDENT LIVING

Extended Foster Care (EFC) can be reimbursed by the State of Florida.

EFC (Broward) – total 52 children receiving \$250 stipend - \$13,000

EFC (Palm Beach) - total 37 children receiving \$250 stipend - \$9,250

Secondary Education – there is Statute that will not allow us to disburse any more than the \$1,256 stipend they receive each month. In order for ChildNet to be consistent in supporting everyone in a similar fashion, we would need to use unrestricted dollars (from the current budget) to pay out the following amounts:

Broward – 102 youth receiving \$250 stipend - \$25,500

Palm Beach – 48 youth receiving \$250 stipend - \$12,000

ADOPTIONS

Broward – 2,800 adoptive families receiving \$250 stipend - \$700,000 (can be covered by current budget)

Palm Beach – 2,000 adoptive families receiving \$250 stipend - \$500,000 (would be a potential deficit)

Similarly, the above adoption amounts are also reimbursable by the state, that would mean we could recoup any deficits generated over the entire contract period because it would just carry forward year-to-year. There may be a possibility of receiving FEMA reimbursement as well.

After discussion, the Board is very supportive of the above dollar amounts for foster group, independent living and adoptions, and to be equally disbursed in both counties.

Regarding the group home providers, we have assured them that we need them to continue business operations and to ensure we have placements for the children that is constant and stable. Should they experience additional overtime because they needed more staff during the day, etc., ChildNet will support their partners in anything they experience directly related to this crisis and it would be included in any ask requested during his pandemic. One of the concerns that was brought up statewide is that many of our agencies depend on fundraising to support this community effort. As they are not able to have group settings, events are being cancelled and this could potentially put an additional burden on their operation. This is more prevalent in some of their contracts as there is a contractual match requirement. Many use the funds received from fundraising to meet this match obligation. We are working with our providers to see what they had planned for the last quarter and what their capacity is to still meet their match requirement.

Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) – we are working collectively with other lead agencies through the FCC to obtain resources, i.e. masks, wipes, gloves, etc. Sunshine Health has provided wipes to both offices and we obtained gloves from our janitorial vendor; we have created small packets to include wipes and gloves for those staff who are still required to see children/families face-to-face.



COMMITTEE UPDATES

- **Advisory Board Committee – Armando Fana, Committee Chair**

Larry Rein reported that the Committee met and discussed, in addition to the above COVID-19 update, that we continue to see a decrease in removals. Statewide calls to the hotline are significantly down.

- **Fundraising Committee – Andrea Cunningham, Director of Community Relations**

Andrea Cunningham noted the following:

- Palm Beach Care for Kids Luncheon – The 04-07-20 luncheon has been postponed with a new date pending. Currently, none of the donors and sponsors have backed out and are very understanding of postponement due to this crisis.

- **Governance Committee – Michael Lepera, Committee Chair**

- COVID-19 - Michael Lepera reported that Mr. Rein provided an update on COVID-19 as noted above.
- CHS – CHS continues to have low caseloads. We continue to move forward with them in trying to get back-of-the-bill funding to resolve some of their projected deficit for this fiscal year.

- **Program Quality Committee**

- Julie DeMar reported the meeting was cancelled due to another conflicting meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

- There was no new business.

BOARD CHAIR REPORT – Sigrid McCawley

- We are seeing the numbers of children coming into care hold steady. However, she has a concern we may see an uptick of the numbers due to the pandemic and wants to ensure ChildNet is planning for this. While our financial posture is holding steady, there could be ramifications that we are not yet seeing as this is an unprecedented event.

CEO/PRESIDENT REPORT – Larry Rein

- Legislative Update – Mr. Rein reported that the legislative session ended a week ago. The DCF Accountability bill that passed was essentially the way we wanted it to be which is to set the framework for defining what are the right outcomes to grade CBCs, managing entities and CLS. This grading system will be a work in progress over the next year.
- Appropriations – There is an increase to the CBC's core funding of approximately \$12 million. How those funds are to be allocated will not be based on a new funding formula. ChildNet Broward and Palm Beach will likely receive a small portion of the \$12 million. In addition, there is a possibility that it will be allocated towards reducing caseloads and increasing case management. If that is the case, then ChildNet Palm Beach may benefit more significantly.
- Risk Pool – There was approval of \$5 million in risk pool funding for CBCs to access for next fiscal year if they have projected deficits.



- Back-of-Bill Funding – There was approval of \$20 million in back-of-bill funding. It is hopeful that the Governor will approve. We are hopeful that ChildNet Palm Beach will get some portion of that funding, which we will share with CHS.
- Replication of Oak Street Home – Legislature approved an appropriation of \$250,000 for ChildNet to replicate this program with four Palm Beach teenage girls.

The budget went to the Governor last Friday and he has two (2) weeks to approve or make line item vetoes of that budget. The Governor’s deadline is Friday, April 3, 2020.

OLD BUSINESS

- There was no old business.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- There was no public comment.

NEXT MEETING DATE

- The next scheduled Board meeting is Friday, April 24, 2020 via teleconference.
- Having no further business, a motion was *moved* to adjourn the meeting. *A vote was taken. The motion was passed unanimously.* The meeting was adjourned at 9:16 a.m.

Amy Black
Board Secretary

Date

(Corporate Seal)