



BOARD MEETING MINUTES

April 23, 2021

Board of Directors:

Michael Lepera, Board Chair; Amy Black, Vice Chair; Victoria Thurston, Secretary, Joseph Rogers, Treasurer, Armando Fana, Josefa Benjamin, Meghan Russell, Melida Akiti, Rebecca Brock, Ronald Ford, Sigrid McCawley

Unable to Attend:

Amy Black, Armando Fana, Meghan Russell, Melida Akiti, Sigrid McCawley

Other Attendees:

ChildNet Staff: Larry Rein, Donna Eprifania, Jason Tracey, Julie DeMar, Rae Bullard, Susan Eby, Deena Ponto, Sheryl Williams, Tamaru Phillips, Andrea Cunningham, Julie Janello, Sharon Walker, Daffodil Otto, Shanell Smart, *DCF:* Dawn Liberta, Dennis Miles, Teresa Janeczek

CALL TO ORDER – Michael Lepera, Board Chair

- Michael Lepera, Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 8:06 a.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Dr. Victoria Thurston, Board Secretary

- Roll was taken, and quorum was established.

The March 26, 2021 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 employee:
 - March 2021 – Shanell Smart, Child Advocate Supervisor, Unit B4 and Sharon Walker, Child Advocate Supervisor, Unit B3

DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

- Case Management Specialty Court Initiatives – Julie DeMar, CPO, provided a brief summary on ChildNet's specialty court initiatives:

Early Childhood Court (ECC) – Specialty court focused on children 0-3 in the dependency system. Intention is to increase positive bonding through the use of parent-child psychotherapy and increased visitation. In Palm Beach, we have 1 staff with approximately 14 children in the ECC Court. In Broward, we have a unit with 6 staff dedicated to the initiative and serving 52 children.

Family Drug Court – Specialty court focused on parents with substance abuse disorders. Court focuses on increased visitation, improved substance abuse services and incentives to promote children being returned home safely in a timelier manner. Palm Beach has 1 staff with 5 children being served and Broward has a unit with 5 staff who serve 42 children.



Broward has the following specialty courts:

HOPE Court – Court serving children who are 17 years old with a restorative justice lens. The program uses circles and vision boarding and works to prepare the youth for turning 18 and aging out of the foster care system. We have 2 staff, 1 supervisor and 1 director who are involved in the team that supports this court initiative. The court serves 10 youth.

RISE Court – RISE stands for Restoring Independence, Strength and Empowerment. Court serves crossover youth with human trafficking findings or indications in their history. The group focuses on placement, services and other items that intend to move forward the youth positively and reduce any additional incidents of human trafficking. There are two staff who work in RISE Court and they serve 10 youth. At this time, it is all young ladies; however, the court can serve young men as well.

ICWA Court – Our youth who are members of the Seminole Tribe are served by a tribal court initiative and partnership between the Tribe and the courts. Run by Judge Izquierdo, we have two staff who manage these cases and participate in this court initiative.

Palm Beach has the following specialty court:

Therapeutic Court – This is a specialty court focused on our youth with challenging mental health concerns and significant history of trauma. The youth are permanently committed to the Department and available for adoption. The court works to improve placement stability, ensure appropriate therapeutic interventions and identify innovative approaches as well, and focuses on how to achieve permanency for these children.

ITEM FOR BOARD REVIEW AND APPROVAL – Michael Lepera, Board Chair

- **Board Candidate – Provider Representative – Tom Lukasik** – Larry Rein and Michael Lepera met with Mr. Lukasik, VP of Community Engagement at 4Kids of South Florida. They both feel that Mr. Lukasik would be a great asset to the Board as the provider representative. His position would be a non-voting, ex-officio member of the Board.

A motion was moved and seconded to approve Tom Lukasik as the provider representative of the Board. A vote was taken. The ayes have it and the motion was adopted.

FINANCE REPORT – Joe Rogers, Board Treasurer and Donna Eprifania, CFO

- Donna Eprifania reported that both counties are operating in a stable and/or healthy position. Based on our current posture, specifically in Broward, we are looking to utilize the carry-forward or additional resources to start building our evidence-based practice capacity.

COVID-19 UPDATE – Larry Rein, CEO and President

- Larry Rein reported that senior leadership had their first meetings on planning for staff's eventual return to the office. The initial discussions have been about how it is going to look different in terms of on-site presence. There are many staff and many functions that are being done very effectively remotely. There is the sense that actually there may be more increased use of off-site and remote work in the future. No matter how it looks, we will still be very committed to ensuring that we maintain a sense of physical contact and cohesion. It will likely be some hybrid going forward, once we come back to the offices, where those people and functions that can work remotely will be given some opportunity to do so. Mr. Lepera suggested polling staff to see who wants to come back into the office and/or work from home. Mr. Rein concurred.



COMMITTEE UPDATES

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

Larry Rein reported the committee met and discussed the quarterly update of the Census and Placement Trends. We continue to move in the right direction; however, more slowly than we anticipated. The use of foster homes and relative caregivers has increased. We continue to gain on getting to our goal of 82 case-carrying case managers. In addition, we have bulked up our recruitment staff to assist in both counties.

The Quarterly Performance Report, issued by the Department, is a draft as they get ready to do their report card. The Quality Office, created by DCF in response to the legislature's passage last year of the DCF Accountability Act, is preparing for, in the next fiscal year, starting to grade communities on their child welfare systems. They are fleshing out the measures and started quarterly regional and statewide meetings to review their initial results and findings. In the last quarterly meeting, out of 26 objective quantifiable measures, the Southeast Region (Broward, Palm Beach, Treasure Coast) is meeting or exceeding 23 targets. Palm Beach has met or exceeded 24 out of the 26 measures. Dennis Miles, DCF Southeast Regional Managing Director, reported that starting 07-01-21, for one year, the DCF Quality Office will evaluate the child welfare system in each circuit and will assign a child welfare grade to each circuit (end of 06-22). The grading will be publicized. The grade will consist of the work that DCF and the Broward Sheriff's Office does with child investigations, what ChildNet does with case management, and what Children's Legal Services does on the legal side. Mr. Miles feels the work we are currently doing, ahead of the beginning of the June 1st evaluation, is positioning ourselves in a really good place.

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

Andrea Cunningham reported on the following.

- Circle of Supporters - we have gained two new members this past month and are up to 13 members now.
- Virtual Auction – ChildNet's virtual auction will be held from June 1-7th. In addition to all of the other wonderful auction items, Colonel Benjamin donated Sheriff-For-A-Day to our auction. To participate in the auction, you will need to register. Registration is free, but required, to bid on items. Registration link will be sent shortly.
- Media – Yesterday, Larry Rein, along with Bailey Hughes, a foster parent out of Palm Beach County, were interviewed by WSFL, CH 39 on the topic of Foster Care Awareness Month. We will be posting this on our website under the "News" section on the first page

- **Governance Committee – Amy Black, Committee Chair**

- **Quarterly Strategic Plan Update**

- Goal 1 – Create a 1% total budget contingency fund through a combination of fundraising and revenue maximization. At the end of the 3rd quarter of this fiscal year, we are at .91% of the goal amount of \$1,327,967.
- Goal 2 – Safely decrease the use of residential group care by 30%. At the end of the 3rd quarter, the number of children in residential group care - Annual Mean for Broward is a 34% decrease from FY 18-19 and for Palm Beach is a 25% decrease from FY 18-19. The Monthly Mean for Broward is a 19% decrease from 06-19 and for Palm Beach is a 22% decrease from 06-19.



- Goal 3 – Create a fully implemented new corporate structure with management company and two unique organizations with individual boards by May 2020. We had renewed discussions with the DCF Deputy Secretary for Administration about consolidating the two CBC lead agency contracts. We also had an initial conversation with newly appointed Secretary Shevaun Harris who is fully aware of the request and will fully vet the request.

- **Membership Recruitment** – Larry Rein reported we are awaiting the application that was sent to Nancy Gregoire, an attorney in Broward. In Palm Beach, we have six prospective candidates with the assistance from the AdHoc committee created by the Palm Beach Community Alliance.

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

Julie DeMar reported that the committee met and discussed, in-depth, the DCF Quality Office Report that includes 26 measures. In addition, they discussed some of the outcomes from the CBCIH information in terms of the different HEDIS measures and items that are related to children’s medical care. Discussion was held that the Department has been engaged in a ‘secret shopper’ by calling around to seasoned foster home management agencies to get details on how follow-up calls happen with prospective foster parents and ways in which that system can be improved. Susan Eby, Chief Clinical Quality Officer, and Andrew Wallick, Director of Service Quality’s team, will continue on their own to do those check-ins with our agencies.

NEW BUSINESS

- There was no new business to report.

CONTINUING BUSINESS

- ChildNet’s Anti-Racism Workgroup Update – Sheryl Williams, P.O. of Case Management and Adoptions, reported that the “Implicit Bias and Microaggression Training” will be held on 06-14-21 and 06-22-21, presented by Dr. Danniella Jones. In addition, Ms. Williams, Dr. Tamaru Phillips and Rae Bullard, CHRO, are meeting to discuss the possibility of having two speakers (one being a licensed therapist) to have a chat with staff to discuss the conviction of Derek Chauvin on George Floyd’s death.

BOARD CHAIR REPORT – Michael Lepera

- Mr. Lepera encouraged everyone to continue to reach out and connect with colleagues, family and friends.

CEO/PRESIDENT REPORT – Larry Rein

- Legislative Update - Mr. Rein reported that this is the most unusual session ever due to the pandemic. The only contact is informal or virtual meetings with legislators. Currently, select members of the legislature are in closed conference for the budget, as there is approximately a \$3 billion gap between the House Budget and the Senate Budget regarding the use of federal COVID-19 relief funds. The expected reductions in this year’s funding for child welfare and substance abuse and mental health will not happen. The indication so far is of a flat funding for child welfare in the budget for next year.

Special Appropriations – ChildNet’s two (2) special local appropriations are still alive:

- 1) \$630,000 - Replicate the Oak Street Program. This program will be for 4 of the most challenging teenage girls in Palm Beach. Sponsored by Representative Caruso and Senator Powell.



- 2) \$360,000 – Safety Management Services for substance abusing parents. This program would be a targeted, intensive upfront intervention at the beginning to try to prevent removals for families that are beset by opioid or other substance abuse. Sponsored by Representative Silvers and Senator Berman.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- There was no public comment.

NEXT MEETING DATE

- The next Board meeting is scheduled on Friday, May 21, 2021 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 9:07 a.m.



Dr. Victoria Thurston
Board Secretary



Date

(Corporate Seal)