



BOARD MEETING MINUTES

May 17, 2024

Board of Directors:

Amy Black, Board Chair; Victoria Thurston, Vice Chair; Rebecca Brock, Secretary, Meghan Russell, Treasurer, Bill Reicherter, 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:

Heidi Schaeffer, Meghan Russell, Michael Lepera, Nancy Stamper, Ronald Ford

Other Attendees:

ChildNet Staff: Larry Rein, Neiko Shea, Donna Eprifania, Jason Tracey, Julie DeMar, Deena Ponto, Nicole Slade, Shanny Tozzi, Tina Lewis, Sheree Tortora, Dora Garton, Lorry Bowles, Jon'Keria Hankerson, Zahne Singletary, Brielle Gipson, Nyasha Nedd Wright, Mariah Golson, Julie Janello, *DCF:* Traci Schweitzer

CALL TO ORDER – Amy Black, Board 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 April 26, 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 – Tina Lewis, Director of HR

- The ChildNet Board Employee Recognition Award was presented to the following deserving employees:
 - April 2024 – Brielle Gipson, Dependency Case Manager, Unit 101 (PB)
Jon'Keria Hankerson, Dependency Case Manager, Unit 121 (PB)

DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

- Adoptions Department – Broward – Julie DeMar provided a brief overview of the Adoption Department in Broward. Ted Ponto leads the Adoption Department, with two supervisors, Joanna Neves and Claudene Stetzer, who oversee different aspects of the adoption process. Joanna Neves supervises adoption specialists working on cases where children are already placed in their prospective adoptive homes. Claudene Stetzer is responsible for recruiting adoptive families, conducting home studies, and providing post-adoption support. Specialists work on finalizing adoptions once a termination of parental rights (TPR) petition is filed and granted. Staff are assigned cases when a TPR petition is filed and work to become familiar with the cases during the legal process. Efforts are made to place children with adoptive families, which may include kinship placements or foster parents who wish to adopt. The department has an annual adoption goal, with



the current year's target being 170 adoptions. The previous year's goal was 180. Adoption specialists conduct child studies, prepare necessary documents, and ensure compliance with legal requirements for disclosures and subsidies. The program provides additional recruiters, Wendy's Wonderful Kids, who focus on identifying potential adoptive placements by getting to know the children and finding connections in their lives that could lead to adoption. Two staff members are dedicated to post-adoption activities, providing resources, referrals, and support to adoptive families. This includes required contact at the one-year post-adoption mark. The department celebrates National Adoption Day each November with events in both Palm Beach and Broward counties. The department faces challenges in recruiting adoptive families for teenagers and children with complex needs. Efforts are ongoing to find additional funding and support, such as the Heart Gallery's recruitment activities and support services. The overall goal is to ensure that children in foster care are placed in permanent, loving homes as efficiently and effectively as possible.

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

- Donna Eprifania reported that Broward is in a stable financial position and recently received an additional \$300,000 to offset residential group care expenditures. Broward is in the black, while Palm Beach continues to struggle, particularly with residential group care costs. Both Broward and Palm Beach received amendments to offset expenditures. Palm Beach received a grant for prevention initiatives to help redirect some expenditures. Palm Beach has an overall \$2.3 million deficit, offset by \$500,000. The rolling deficit from the previous year is \$1.1 million, leading to an \$800,000 deficit for the current year. DCF is now requiring budgeting by individual OCA (Operating Cost Account) to avoid overstating allocations and prevent year-end deficits. ChildNet committed \$400,000 from its contingency fund to balance the budget.

Post-COVID workforce and insurance costs have significantly increased. A five-year snapshot showed an increase in group care costs from \$5 million to \$11 million, despite only a slight increase in the number of children. Our initial insurance proposal shows a 5% increase in insurance costs, primarily in general and professional liability, with slight decreases in workers' comp and cyber insurance. The organization successfully filed its taxes (990) and is finalizing the transition to a new 403B platform, effective July 1, with educational sessions planned for staff. Discussion also highlighted a positive shift in DCF's understanding and approach to financial challenges, aiming for proactive engagement with the legislature to address funding needs.

COMMITTEE UPDATES

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

The Committee meeting primarily focused on the importance of forming partnerships to support the services needed for families and children. The committee builds relationships with partners to support the bottom line of services for families and children, not necessarily for direct funding. ChildNet-branded stewardship notes were sent to the board for them to thank people for their interest and involvement. Efforts are underway to partner with Extended Stay America for discounted rates and donations due to the organization's significant expenditure on extended stays. ChildNet is negotiating with Best Buy to secure 75 laptops for graduates. Although Best Buy lacks a formal donation process, they are working on pricing, with ongoing negotiations.



1. Graduation Ceremonies: We are organizing ceremonies for graduates in Palm Beach on 06-05-24 and graduates in Broward on 06-20-24, with partnerships for venue and sponsorship opportunities starting at \$250.
2. Broward Care for Kids Cocktail Event: May 22, 2024 at Lauderdale Yacht Club. 195 expected guests (venue capacity 210-220). Currently raised \$79,000 through tickets and sponsorships. The Goal is \$150,000 to be achieved through donations, live auctions, and raffles.

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

- **Review Management of Operational Procedures (MOP)** – Julie DeMar gave a brief overview of the MOP, which is the mechanism that demonstrates the review of policies and procedures, both internally and externally, in both counties. The MOP is also reviewed with the Program Quality Committee. External reviewers include the Department of Children and Families' Quality Office, their Licensing Department, and their Contract Oversight Unit, and the Florida Certification Board. Compliance reviews, previously managed by CBCIH, have transitioned to a direct contract with Sunshine Health, requiring updates to certain procedures. The fiscal year saw updates to several procedures, but no changes to policies. These updates were a result of both internal reviews and external feedback. The organization has completed a new policy on policies and procedures to streamline future reviews and updates, assigning responsibility to executive team members for specific policies and procedures. Internal reviews and updates are ongoing. External reviews did not result in any official corrective action plans. A potential corrective action plan concerning psychotropic medication management was discussed, stemming from a past audit by the Department of Children and Families. There were historical concerns about the administration of psychotropic medications to foster children, leading to a proposed corrective action plan. This was due to issues with communication between the Medicaid information system and the Department of Children and Families' information system. DCF initially planned a corrective action plan for lead agencies regarding psychotropic medication oversight but has now decided to forego further action on this plan. However, informal spot checks will continue to ensure compliance with state requirements. Recent reviews, including a visit from the Department of Children and Families Licensing Department, went well with no identified issues. The transition to Sunshine Health has been smooth, with updated procedures meeting compliance standards. There are ongoing efforts to maintain and improve compliance with policies and procedures, adapting to new contracts, and addressing historical audit findings in a proactive manner.
- **Board Skills and Committees** – Discussion held that there are new board members, and the goal is to have each of them join at least one committee. New members are encouraged to review committee options and express their interest to either Larry Rein or Amy Black. Those members with additional time are invited to consider joining other committees if they find something of interest. Prospective committee appointments are noted below:
 - Program Quality Committee - Mark Dhooge – accepted appointment
 - Community Engagement Committee - Malala Mezerhane – accepted appointment
 - Finance Committee – Bill Reicherter – accepted appointment
- **Prospective Board Officer Slate – FY 2024-2025** – Larry Rein explained that according to ChildNet's bylaws, each Officer of the Board of Directors is allowed two consecutive one-year terms. All current officers are reaching the end of their terms. Historically, board members often move up in rank, but it is not always the case. Dr. Thurston has decided not to take on the role



of Chair due to personal reasons. Mr. Rein and Amy Black have strategized alternatives as noted below:

- Board Chair – Col. Josefa Benjamin
- Vice Chair – Rebecca Brock, as well as Chair of Governance/Executive Committee
- Treasurer - Michael Lepera, as well as Chair of Finance Committee
- Secretary – Lois Marino
- Member at Large – Dr. Heidi Schaeffer

The final Board Officer Slate will be presented for formal vote at the June 2024 Annual Board meeting.

- **Annual Board Survey** – Discussion held that no revisions were needed to the Board Survey questions. Julie Janello will send a Survey Monkey link to the full Board for completion of the survey in order that the results of the survey can be prepared for the Annual Board meeting in Jun
- **Membership Recruitment** – Larry Rein reported that there are two vacancies on the board for Palm Beach County and noted that a recent prospective candidate did not work out. The aim is to have nine members from Palm Beach to equalize the number between Palm Beach and Broward counties. Efforts are ongoing to recruit suitable candidates to fill the vacancies and balance the board representation between the two counties. It was suggested that we focus on candidates in law enforcement in Palm Beach.

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

ChildNet established a formal Compliance Committee due to a contract requirement with Sunshine Health, with Chief Legal Officer Jason Tracy serving as Chief Compliance Officer. The committee comprises 10-12 members from various departments and first met on April 3, 2024, to assign roles and responsibilities. Mr. Tracy provided updates, including three recent Level 3 incidents and the dismissal of a legal matter involving a former employee. The Compliance Committee ensures adherence to policies, procedures, and manages reports of issues via an anonymous hotline. Tina Lewis, Human Resources Director, reported no HR updates at this time. The committee's purpose is to maintain compliance and manage risks, not due to any specific incident but as a good practice and contractual obligation.

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

Nancy Stamper reported that the committee discussed several updates and trends. Julie DeMar presented 7 procedural updates required by DCF to align with Senate Bill 664, involving prescribed language adjustments. Mr. Rein then discussed the 3rd quarter census trends, noting a significant decrease in the number of dependent children in Broward County, attributed to effective resource use and support for families. In contrast, Palm Beach saw a slight increase in child removals and a rise in children in residential group care. Efforts are underway to reduce these numbers, with senior leadership focusing on strategic plans and evaluating viable alternatives for children with complex needs. The committee aims to demonstrate these changing trends to the legislature to address the evolving needs of the child population.



CONTINUING BUSINESS

- **ChildNet's Anti-Racism Workgroup Update** – Nicole Slade provided an update on the Workgroup's several upcoming activities. They will discuss the Netflix movie "Shirley," which chronicles Shirley Chisholm's historic 1972 presidential run, hoping to engage in meaningful discussions about the post-civil rights movement era. Several Workgroup members will attend a training on June 3rd presented by the Children's Services Council of Broward titled "Growing an Equitable Community," aiming to adapt the training for all ChildNet staff. Additionally, they are planning a Juneteenth celebration, with details to be discussed in their next committee meeting.

BOARD CHAIR REPORT – Amy Black

- Amy Black encouraged participation in the upcoming graduation celebrations, highlighting their fulfillment and importance. Ms. Black announced that the June meeting will be her last as she steps down from the role, expressing gratitude for the opportunity to serve and confidence in her successor, Colonel Benjamin. She thanked the team and board members for their support and contributions over the past six years.

CEO/PRESIDENT REPORT – Larry Rein

- **ITN** – Larry Rein discussed the ongoing process of negotiating to continue being the lead agency in Palm Beach and Broward Counties. The process has been slow, but a significant breakthrough occurred with the receipt of an updated supplemental contract. Many recommendations from lead agencies were acknowledged, leading to progress. The intent to award has been postponed to June 10th, and comments on the supplemental contract are due next Friday.
- **Meeting with DCF Secretary** – Larry Rein reported a positive and optimistic outlook following a productive meeting with the DCF Secretary. There was also a fruitful meeting in Orlando with six CEOs of lead agencies and six service providers, highlighting the importance of collaboration in addressing child welfare challenges in Florida. Action steps from this meeting will be presented to the Florida Coalition for Children (FCC) Board. Mr. Rein expressed a renewed sense of optimism about the future and ongoing relationships.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- There was no public comment.

NEXT MEETING DATE

- Annual Board Meeting - Friday, June 28, 2024, at 8:00 a.m. in person and via Zoom.

ADJOURNMENT

- Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:26 a.m.

Rebecca Brock
Board Secretary

Date

(Corporate Seal)

