



BOARD MEETING MINUTES

September 26, 2025

Board of Directors:

Col. Josefa Benjamin, Board Chair; Rebecca Brock, Vice Chair; Michael Lepera, Treasurer; Lois Marino, Secretary; Bill Reicherter, Carolina Raineau, Donna Korn, Dr. Heidi Schaeffer, Karen Cabrera, Maria Mezerhane, Michael DiBrizzi, Nancy W. Stamper, Paul Adams, Dr. Ronald Ford, Sabria McElroy, Stefanie Title, Dr. Victoria Thurston

Unable to Attend:

Nancy Stamper

Other Attendees:

ChildNet Staff: Larry Rein, Neiko Shea, Donna Eprifania, Julie DeMar, Alcolya St. Juste, Rebecca Lindstadt, Shanny Tozzi, Noelle Brillembourg, Tina Lewis, Daffodil Otto, LaShayna Williams, Kimberly Lehmann, Jennifer Leslie, Julie Janello, *DCF:* Traci Schweitzer, Isis Williams, Christy Gillis, *PB County:* Elisa Cramer

CALL TO ORDER – Col. Josefa Benjamin, Board Chair

- Col. Josefa Benjamin, Board Chair, called the meeting to order at 8:02 a.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Lois Marino, Board Secretary

- Roll was taken, and quorum was established.

The August 29, 2025 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:
 - August 2025 – Kimberly Lehmann, Community Relations Coordinator (Regional)
LaShayna Williams, Unit Staff Assistant – Unit B (BWD)

ITEM FOR BOARD REVIEW AND APPROVAL – Col. Josefa Benjamin, Board Chair

- **Board Candidate – Charles Hanna** – Larry Rein noted that Lois Marino recommended Charles Hanna as a potential board candidate. Mr. Hanna is a Wealth Management Advisor at Fifth Third Bank. Mr. Hanna started his career as an attorney and is also an adoptive father. Both Mr. Rein and Josefa Benjamin met with Mr. Hanna and stated he would be a great asset to the Board.

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



DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

- **Kinship/Level 1** – Dr. Rebecca Lindstadt, Chief Service Quality Officer, provided an overview of ChildNet's Level 1 and Kinship licensing program, which allows children in Broward and Palm Beach counties to be placed with relatives, fictive kin, or connected non-relatives to ensure they remain in family-like settings whenever possible. Caregivers are contacted within two business days of placement to begin the licensing process, which takes about 60–80 days and includes support services, education, and case management.

Once licensed, families receive quarterly support and assistance with relicensing and may qualify for the Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP), which provides federal financial benefits, though caregivers cannot receive both GAP and SSI simultaneously. Dr. Lindstadt also outlined the regional staffing structure dedicated to supporting these families. Larry Rein noted that kinship licensing has only been in place in Florida for about four years as a result of federal policy changes, and while it increases access to federal funding and support for families, the process continues to evolve and improve.

COMMITTEE UPDATES

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

Lois Marino provided an update highlighting the development of a preliminary 24-month strategic plan focused on increasing ChildNet's brand visibility, attracting high-net-worth and corporate donors, and strategically securing grants. The plan is still in early stages, with priorities and timelines to be established, but represents the first structured fundraising roadmap for the organization.

Ms. Marino also announced a major new initiative: consolidating previous separate events into one large signature fundraising gala to be held on May 9, 2026 at the Hard Rock. This event is intended to be a high-impact fundraiser with strategic invitees and strong board participation. Board members were asked to attend, engage their networks, and help ensure the gala's success.

Larry Rein acknowledged that prior fundraising efforts lacked formal planning but emphasized that expectations have evolved. The board's role in fundraising and community engagement will be elevated moving forward, with increased accountability and involvement to support ChildNet's mission.

- **Finance Committee** – **Michael Lepera, Committee Chair and Donna Eprifania, CFO**

Michael Lepera reported that the committee continued discussions related to the performance bond and focused primarily on reviewing potential changes to how contracts for Community-Based Care providers are funded. Rather than using a flat per-child rate, the proposal under consideration would implement variable rates based on the child's placement type, such as foster homes versus group homes, which would result in different reimbursement levels. The committee discussed potential benefits and challenges of this model, and the issue remains under active review.

Larry Rein explained that Florida's child welfare funding has historically relied on historical allocations and political influence, with Broward and Miami-Dade receiving more due to past lawsuits and relationships. Over the past three years, the Legislature has tasked DCF with creating a fairer funding model. Early proposals by Mercer and KPMG faced resistance, but the current effort continues to refine last year's plan. Progress is being made through weekly collaboration with lead agencies, including two CEOs and two CFOs, among them ChildNet's CFO, Donna Eprifania, working closely with state leadership.



DCF and KPMG are developing a refined per-member, per-month funding model for lead agencies, with a report due to the Legislature and Governor by December 1. Unlike last year's single blended rate, the new model will vary rates based on the type of care a child receives, addressing differences between low-cost foster care and high-cost group homes.

Key implementation considerations include revenue stability, fluctuations in client numbers, and ensuring funding reflects true needs rather than just historical costs. The model will consider five tiers recommended by the legislature. Thus far, the focus of the work has been on two of them: Tier 1: Fixed payments covering staff and administrative costs to ensure workforce stability, and Tier 3: Variable per-member, per-month allocations based on census and service type. While the new approach is more thoughtful and inclusive of lead agency input, caution is needed to ensure agencies like ChildNet are fairly reimbursed for Tier 1 costs, given their historically efficient administrative spending.

Donna Eprifania reported that ChildNet has efficiently shared 85 regional positions across Broward and Palm Beach counties to provide strong administrative oversight. As of the August 2025 snapshot, both counties are in a positive budget position, despite some first-quarter expenditure lags due to retrospective provider payments. Additional resources for Palm Beach strengthened the balance sheet, enabling submission of interim financial statements to the broker. ChildNet is now in the final stages of securing the performance bond required for contracts in both counties.

- **Governance/Executive Committee – Rebecca Brock, Committee Chair**

- **FY 2024-2025 CEO Scorecard/Evaluation** - Larry Rein reported that the executive committee will review the CEO's self-evaluation and the annual quantitative evaluation over the second and third weeks of October, then finalize scoring for presentation to the full board at the October 2025 meeting. A minor issue arose because DCF did not provide one of the measures used last year, requiring the committee to identify an alternative, though it is not expected to significantly impact the evaluation.
- **Membership Recruitment** - Larry Rein reported there is currently one open seat on the Board of Directors that needs to be filled by a representative from Palm Beach. Board members were asked to provide suggestions, referrals, or recommendations. The board composition is otherwise strong, and bylaws call for 18 voting members with equal representation from Broward and Palm Beach.

- **Program Quality Committee – Nancy W. Stamper, Committee Chair**

The Program Quality Committee met on September 10th, combining its work with the former adolescent ad hoc committee. They reviewed adolescent outcomes, including Baker Acts, arrests, school attendance, and goal achievement, as well as the 2024–2025 incident report roll-up, analyzing incidents by provider and placement.

A key focus is supporting teens in foster care, a population that is challenging to serve effectively. ChildNet created Adolescent Care Coordinator positions to provide additional support to 15- and 16-year-olds in licensed out-of-home care. These efforts have led to improved school performance, reduced behavioral incidents, and increased youth employment participation.

ChildNet is now working to expand employment opportunities for interested youth by documenting existing programs and exploring ways to increase access. Successes include strong participation in Broward's Summer Employment Program and a small-scale Palm Beach initiative that provides job preparation and peer support, with initial results encouraging.



- **Real Estate Committee – Donna Korn, Committee Chair**

There is no update as the committee did not meet in September.

BOARD CHAIR REPORT – Col. Josefa Benjamin

Col. Benjamin provided a brief recap of the meeting, highlighting successes and areas of progress. Key points included the positive impact of creative initiatives, ongoing advancement in community engagement with a clear plan, and strong communication with the Department of Children and Families. She also acknowledged staff participation in Spirit Week, emphasizing the importance of recognizing achievements while continuing to seek improvements.

CEO/PRESIDENT REPORT – Larry Rein

- **National Issues** – Larry Rein reported that there are no major national developments affecting foster care funding, though potential future reductions in SNAP and Medicaid for adults could indirectly impact youth. The only recent change is that former foster youth are now subject to the same SNAP work requirements as other adults. Mr. Rein highlighted the upcoming Center for Community-Based Child Welfare Symposium, emphasizing Florida's leadership in community-based foster care models. The event will provide opportunities to learn from other states and explore legislative ideas, particularly around liability insurance, while sharing Florida's successful practices.
- **Statewide Issues** – Larry Rein highlighted that DCF's current administration under Secretary Taylor Hatch is highly collaborative and receptive to provider input, particularly regarding challenges and the funding model. Additionally, the Florida Coalition for Children (FCC) is undergoing leadership transition, as longtime CEO Kurt Kelly retires. Over 100 applicants applied, and a selection committee, which includes Mr. Rein and Michael DiBrizzi, has narrowed the pool to eight strong candidates for interviews.

PUBLIC COMMENT

- There was no public comment.

NEXT MEETING DATE

- October 31, 2026 @ 8:00 a.m.

ADJOURNMENT

- Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:10 a.m.

Lois Marino

Lois Marino
Board Secretary

10-31-25

Date

(Corporate Seal)