



# BOARD MEETING MINUTES

**October 31, 2025**

**Board of Directors:**

Col. Josefa Benjamin, Board Chair; Rebecca Brock, Vice Chair; Michael Lepera, Treasurer; Lois Marino, Secretary; Bill Reicherter, Carolina Raineau, Charles Hanna, 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:**

Sabria McElroy

**Other Attendees:**

*ChildNet Staff:* Larry Rein, Neiko Shea, Donna Eprifania, Julie DeMar, Alcolya St. Juste, Rebecca Lindstadt, Shanny Tozzi, Noelle Brillembourg, Tina Lewis, Deena Ponto, Sheryl Williams Shauna Thomas, Tara Daniels, Courtney Guignard, Julie Janello, *DCF:* Adrienne Reid, Isis Williams, *PB County:* Elisa Cramer

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**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 September 26, 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.*

**WELCOME – Col. Josefa Benjamin, Board Chair**

- Charles Hanna – Col. Benjamin and the rest of the Board welcomed new director, Charles Hanna.

**CHILDNET BOARD EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AWARD – Tina Lewis, Director of HR**

- The ChildNet Board Employee Recognition Award was presented to the following deserving employees:
  - September 2025 – Aquil Foster, Dependency Case Manager – Unit A2 (BWD)  
Shauna Thomas, Legal Counsel (PB)

**DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW**

- **Community Relations Department** – Shanny Tozzi, Director of Community Relations, presented an overview of her department's structure, goals, and key initiatives. She introduced her team: Noelle Brillembourg, who manages fundraising events, social media, and volunteer coordination; and Kimberly Lehmann, who oversees in-kind donations, community drives, and partnerships with churches through the Care Portal. The department's core pillars include fundraising, grant writing, in-kind donations, and community engagement.





Over the past year, ChildNet held two major fundraising events raising approximately \$250,000 net, and plans are underway for the upcoming Ripple Effect Gala and the Ripple Effect Movement, a year-round community fundraising initiative. Ms. Tozzi highlighted growing efforts in grant development to diversify funding and bridge financial gaps, as well as collaborations like the Leadership Broward partnership to improve the SafePlace facility. The department also coordinates community drives for Thanksgiving and the holidays, manages brand visibility with PR firm Kip Hunter Marketing, and supports events such as National Adoption Day in both Broward and Palm Beach counties. This year, National Adoption Day in Palm Beach is Friday, 11-21-25 and in Broward, Saturday, 11-22-25. Overall, the Community Relations Department aims to translate community goodwill into meaningful impact for the children and families ChildNet serves.

## COMMITTEE UPDATES

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

Lois Marino shared updates on new grant opportunities, community partnerships, and the upcoming Ripple Effect Gala, which will replace ChildNet's two annual events with one major fundraiser on May 9, 2026 at the Hard Rock. The gala's theme emphasizes how small acts can create lasting positive change for children and families, aligning with ChildNet's mission. Jarrett and Dara Levan will serve as event chairs, and board members were encouraged to participate, sponsor, and invite guests.

Ms. Marino also introduced the "Ripple Effect Movement", a year-round online fundraising campaign launching in mid-November, enabling board members and community supporters to create personalized pages to broaden awareness and sustain ongoing support for ChildNet. Shanny Tozzi explained the launch of the Ripple Effect Movement, providing board members with email and text templates to easily share donation links within their personal and professional networks. She emphasized that participation requires minimal effort - just a few minutes each week - and that even small donations can create meaningful impact. Noelle Brillembourg added that the templates are fully customizable and can also be adapted for social media, encouraging members to personalize their outreach. Lois Marino highlighted that this is an ideal time for outreach given the holiday season and community needs, noting that the effort also counts toward board members' "give or get" commitments. Board members expressed strong support, commending the Community Engagement team for creating a simple, accessible tool to raise awareness and funds. The meeting concluded with a call for 100% board participation, reinforcing that collective involvement will strengthen ChildNet's visibility and impact in the community.

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

Michael Lepera reported that the Finance Committee met, focusing on the rising costs of group home placements due to the increasing complexity of children's needs, which limits the number who can be placed in foster homes. Donna Eprifania added that while both Broward and Palm Beach are currently on budget, this stability depends on using reserve funds, particularly in Broward, where financial strain is greater. Palm Beach received some relief at the end of the last fiscal year, easing its reliance on reserves. She also noted that the external audit is on track for completion by early December, pending final reconciliation from the department.

During discussion, Bill Reicherter proposed creating a "Contractors for Relief" initiative to engage the South Florida contracting community in fundraising for ChildNet. The idea included hosting events or meetings featuring speakers, such as ChildNet representatives, to raise awareness and financial support. The board responded enthusiastically, suggesting coordination with existing





associations and noting that contractors could also be a valuable target audience for the Ripple Effect Gala.

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

- **FY 2024-2025 CEO Scorecard** - Rebecca Brock reported that the Committee met to review Larry Rein's CEO Scorecard for FY 2024–2025, a process now in its eighth year. She stated that Larry Rein evaluated himself with an overall score of 3.6, while the committee rated him 3.8, noting that he was more critical of his own performance - particularly regarding community engagement and fundraising. The committee praised Mr. Rein for his strong leadership, dedication, and positive influence, emphasizing his commitment to improving financial sustainability while maintaining excellence in service delivery.

Mr. Rein expressed appreciation for the recognition and credited the entire leadership team, staff, and board for the organization's success. He acknowledged that despite increased visibility through marketing and media, desired outcomes, such as recruiting more foster parents (especially for teens) and increasing donations, have not been fully achieved. To address this, ChildNet plans to issue a procurement for a single marketing firm to lead a refreshed, more results-driven outreach strategy.

Mr. Rein also highlighted the importance of maintaining quantitative metrics in the CEO evaluation process. He encouraged other boards to adopt similar objective evaluation tools, emphasizing that measurable goals complement qualitative assessments and help guide organizational improvement and accountability.

- **Membership Recruitment** – Larry Rein reviewed Palm Beach board recruitment, noting one current vacancy. Potential candidate Samantha Ramnarine was discussed, who is the CEO/Owner of Car Accidental Referral Services (CARS) and is widely involved in the South Florida philanthropic community. Larry Rein also shared that Kerry Diaz, former CEO of the Quantum Foundation, has also expressed interest in joining after previous outreach. The committee chose to consider these two options. Mr. Rein will further assess both candidates and report back next month. Lois Marino asked about board size limits, and Mr. Rein confirmed the bylaws currently allow up to 18 voting members (nine per county) plus a non-voting provider representative. Given ChildNet's increased focus on fundraising and engagement, he and Alcolya St. Juste will explore a bylaw amendment to expand the board, with a proposal expected at the next Governance Committee meeting.

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

Julie DeMar reported that the Committee met on October 8 to review contract outcomes presented by Andrew Wallick and the Service Quality Department. The discussion focused on performance metrics for child-placing agencies and residential group homes, including the number of children served, timely medical and dental visits, placement stability, and the incidence of child-on-child abuse or neglect. Mr. Wallick had shared comparative data for both Broward and Palm Beach counties, noting that programs serving more complex youth face greater challenges in " areas. The Service Quality Department continues to monitor and support these providers.

**Council on Accreditation (COA)** – Larry Rein noted that ChildNet is considering whether to pursue reaccreditation by the Council on Accreditation after the cost unexpectedly more than doubled from \$40,000 to over \$90,000, with no clear explanation provided. ChildNet is also questioning the overall value of national accreditation, as many agencies are reevaluating its importance. Although legislation encourages accreditation by suggesting reduced state oversight for accredited agencies,





oversight remains duplicative in practice. Accreditation is no longer required in ChildNet's contract, and similar-sized agencies have opted out without issues.

Senior leadership will prepare a report detailing current compliance and oversight efforts to ensure policies meet state standards, proposing to codify these internally to maintain compliance without COA. They also noted COA's recent merger led to a less rigorous accreditation process. Board members asked about accreditation's impact on funding and contract awards and how fees are calculated. Leadership will research and report back. The topic will be further discussed by the Program Quality Committee and board before the next site visit next year.

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

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

**BOARD CHAIR REPORT – Col. Josefa Benjamin**

Col. Benjamin provided the following summary:

- Leadership Broward has taken on a light renovation project for SafePlace, and Calvary Chapel Outreach will be doing some cleaning and organizing there soon.
- On November 29, 2025, actress Mika King plans to host a re-screening of her movie about a Texas pastor who helped adopt 77 foster youth, in celebration of National Adoption Month, with ChildNet's involvement expected.
- A new bill introduced by local state Rep. Robin Bartleman mandates durable personal bags (like suitcases or duffel bags) for foster youth moving placements, replacing the degrading use of trash bags. This bill aims to provide dignity and improve self-esteem for these youth. The effort is supported by Senator Lori Berman and others.
- A holiday event is tentatively planned for December 8th by a company called Five Element Wellness, focusing on gift-giving to older youth in foster care. More details will be shared later.
- Col. Benjamin is seeking feedback from board members on how to improve meeting efficiency and engagement, emphasizing the importance of meetings being impactful and allowing all questions to be asked and answered.

**CEO/PRESIDENT REPORT – Larry Rein**

- **National Issues** – Larry Rein reported that ChildNet is closely monitoring the federal government shutdown, which may halt SNAP (food stamp) benefits as soon as tomorrow. This poses a serious risk for two key groups we serve:
  - Young adults (ages 18–23) - Almost all rely on SNAP. If benefits are delayed, ChildNet will temporarily increase their state-funded allowances during November to ensure they can buy food.
  - Caregivers and families under supervision - This includes in-home and post-placement parents, as well as many relative caregivers who depend on SNAP. Because ChildNet does not know exactly which families are affected, all dependency case managers have been informed to assist families with a comprehensive guide to local food resources (food banks, United Way drives, etc.) ChildNet is also launching a targeted fundraising campaign to provide food or grocery gift cards.



ChildNet has already received media coverage in the Sun-Sentinel and created a dedicated donation link on their website. Donors can also give via text ("FOODFORHOPE" to 41444). If SNAP funding is restored, donated funds will shift to ChildNet's food and Thanksgiving drive. Board members were encouraged to share the campaign on social media.

- **Statewide Issues** – Larry Rein provided an update on the Florida Legislature–mandated statewide funding formula for community-based care agencies. ChildNet leadership attended a meeting with DCF and KPMG to review the first draft of new per-member, per-month rates, which appear positive and include a proposed statewide funding increase of more than \$100 million across both administrative and services funding. A major improvement in this model is the shift from a single blended rate to separate rates based on types of care, an approach ChildNet advocated for, which more accurately reflects costs, especially for high-cost residential group care. Unlike last year's draft, no agencies raised concerns about their rates, signaling progress. However, issues remain, including DCF's plan to reclaim funds if caseloads decline, without offering performance-based incentives to offset that loss. Mr. Rein emphasized the need for true performance funding and better legislative understanding of outcome measures but expressed overall encouragement that the model continues to improve.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

- There was no public comment.

#### **NEXT MEETING DATE**

- November 21, 2026 @ 8:00 a.m.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

- Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:33 a.m.



Lois Marino  
Board Secretary



Date

(Corporate Seal)