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# BOARD MEETING MINUTES

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**November 22, 2024**

**Board of Directors:**

Col. Josefa Benjamin, Board Chair; Rebecca Brock, Vice Chair; Michael Lepera, Treasurer; Lois Marino, Secretary; Amy Black, Bill Reicherter, Chelsea Bellew, Donna Korn, Dr. Heidi Schaeffer, Maria Mezerhane, Mark Dhooge, Meghan Russell, Nancy W. Stamper, Paul Adams, Dr. Ronald Ford, Sabria McElroy, Dr. Victoria Thurston

**Unable to Attend:**

Chelsea Bellew, Heidi Schaeffer, Maria Mezerhane, Meghan Russell, Ronald Ford

**Other Attendees:**

*ChildNet Staff:* Larry Rein, Neiko Shea, Donna Eprifania, Julie DeMar, Alcolya St. Juste, Deena Ponto, Sheryl Williams, Nicole Slade, Ralph Kanaan, Sheree Tortora, Noelle Brillembourg, Andrew Wallick, Nyasha Nedd Wright, Dora Garton, Tara Collins, Courtney Guignard, Melissa Purvy, Mariah Golson, Sanflore Taylor, Julie Janello, *DCF:* Traci Schweitzer, 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 8:03 a.m.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Lois Marino, Board Secretary**

- Roll was taken, and quorum was established.

The October 25, 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 – Ralph Kanaan, HR Business Partner**

- The ChildNet Board Employee Recognition Award was presented to the following deserving employees:
  - October 2024 – Mariah Golson, Lead Dependency Case Manager - Unit 110 (PB)  
Melissa Purvy, Dependency Case Manager – Unit A2 (Bwd))

**DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW**

- **Service Quality** – Andrew Wallick provided an overview of the ChildNet Service Quality Team, which is divided into two groups: the Quality Manager Team and the Adolescent Care Coordinator Team. The Quality Manager Team has monitored 24 contracts, issued 21 performance improvement plans, delivered various trainings, and implemented the DOMO platform to track performance metrics with real-time dashboards. Their goals include addressing recurring performance issues, sharing dashboards with providers, increasing provider support, and achieving full compliance with psychotropic medication records. The Adolescent Care Coordinator Team focuses on supporting youth aged 15 - 18 by assessing services, engaging them with mentors and life coaches, and improving placement stability, school performance, and readiness for permanency. They aim to reduce arrests and Baker Acts while increasing school attendance and stability.



## COMMITTEE UPDATES

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

Lois Marino highlighted the Committee's efforts in building partnerships for in-kind services and financial support.

### Collaborations:

- Partnering with Florida Barber Academy and the Hollywood Institute for Hair to provide free holiday haircuts for children and families.
- Partnering with the Mobile School Pantry, which operates "farmers market-style" setups at six elementary schools in Broward County, providing fresh produce and groceries to families from fourteen feeder schools. The organization also uses a retrofitted bus, "Max the Bus," to deliver groceries. ChildNet is exploring ways to notify foster families of existing pantry services and identify areas for potential new pantry locations.
- Efforts are underway to negotiate discounted rates with Extended Stay America to reduce costs for housing children and families in emergencies.
- Leadership Broward is being considered for a community project to refresh SafePlace, potentially involving painting and new furniture. Leadership Broward will visit ChildNet for evaluation.
- ChildNet is engaging with Northern Trust and Fifth Third Bank in December to introduce them to the organization and discuss financial needs.
- Florida Blue, a health-focused organization serving Palm Beach and Broward, will visit ChildNet in January to explore opportunities for collaboration.

### New grant opportunities for ChildNet:

- ChildNet is applying for a \$100,000 grant from the Community Foundation of Broward in December, a potential renewal after past funding.
- Identified the William R. Watts Foundation, known for supporting local organizations, and will prepare a grant application for their May to October cycle.
- Discussions held with Memorial Health Systems, focusing on supporting kinship caregivers with a \$10,000–\$15,000 grant for essentials like furniture, clothing, and food. Memorial Health Systems are also committed to sponsoring upcoming events, including a \$25,000 cocktail event sponsorship and \$5,000 luncheon sponsorship.

### Holiday Drives:

- Thanksgiving Drive - provided food and gift cards to over 200 families, benefiting approximately 1,000 individuals.
- Holiday Gift Drive – we are seeking toy and gift card donations, with an emphasis on gift cards for teens. Forever Family contributed significantly by donating a pallet of toys.

### Fundraising Events:

- Palm Beach Care for Kids Luncheon - March 7, 2025: Honoring the Silvestri family who have fostered 14 children and adopted four. Approximately \$34,000 has been raised so far, with a goal to secure more funding through sponsorships and donations.
- Broward Care for Kids Evening of Impact - May 14, 2025: Honoring Cindy Ehrenberg Seltzer for her significant contributions to child welfare through her leadership at the Children's Services Council of Broward.

### Recent financial contributions:

- \$1,000 from Florida State Representative Chip LaMarca's campaign fund
- \$1,500 from Flagler Credit Union for holiday gifts (with a \$10,000 pledge for January)
- \$10,000 from Parkland Cares.



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

Michael Lepera summarized the recent finance committee meeting, which covered topics such as bonding requirements, the ongoing audit that is on track, and the monthly financial review. Donna Eprifania provided updates on the financials, noting that the September reports were included, and October figures are under interim review, with plans to revisit them in January. She explained the process of securing two performance bonds, required for Broward and Palm Beach contracts, estimated at \$50,000, which were not originally budgeted due to post-contract signing requirements.

Ms. Eprifania reported that the audit is proceeding smoothly, facilitated by a more paperless system, and highlighted improved timeliness in receiving statewide reconciliation data from DCF. The audit will be electronically shared with board members for review before submission by December 31. She also noted positive financial trends in Palm Beach despite being slightly over budget due to residential group care, while Broward remains on budget.

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

- **Quarterly Strategic Plan Update – Quarter 3** - Discussion was held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the Strategic Plan for 2023 to 2025, a copy of which was provided to the Committee members.

- Goal 1 – Improve and sustain ChildNet’s workforce by implementing proven and innovative practices. Evidence of goal progress in Year Two: ChildNet will reduce annual external voluntary turnover to 23%.

The target for the year is to reduce external voluntary turnover to 23%, but the current rate remains at 24.6%, showing no recent improvement. Efforts to improve workforce retention include:

- Conducting a Gallup survey with 89% participation and increased engagement.
- Hosting events like health and happiness expos, spirit days, Halloween, and Thanksgiving potlucks, which had higher participation.
- Supervisor training in disciplinary processes and safety training for field staff.
- Planning a holiday gathering on December 12 to honor employees with significant service milestones.

- Goal 2 – Expand the array of appropriate placement and treatment options for children. Evidence of goal progress in Year Two: ChildNet will reduce the percentage of children with stays over 14 days at SafePlace to 28%.

Discussion was held on the progress on expanding treatment and placement options for children, particularly focusing on reducing the percentage of children staying in "SafePlace" facilities. The year 2 target of 28% was surpassed with an overall rate of 24% (18.6% in Palm Beach and 27.8% in Broward).

- Goal 3 – Improve identification and support of kinship caregivers. Evidence of goal progress in Year Two: ChildNet will increase the percentage of children in kinship placements to 61%.

Julie DeMar discussed progress toward improving identification and support for kinship caregivers, with a goal of 61% for year 2. Despite challenges in meeting this goal, there has been sustained improvement, particularly in Broward (53.49%) and Palm Beach (52%). Larry Rein noted that the 60% goal reflects state accountability metrics, though national benchmarks suggest 50% may be a reasonable standard. The focus remains on steady improvement rather than absolute targets.



- **Gallup Survey Results** – Larry Rein presented the results of ChildNet's annual Gallup employee engagement survey, a copy of which was provided to the Board. The Gallup survey began after recognizing widespread employee dissatisfaction when Larry Rein became CEO. The survey includes 12 scientifically validated items measuring employee engagement. ChildNet's survey participation has steadily increased, reaching an impressive 89% in 2024 without extending the deadline. The overall engagement score has improved over time, surpassing a score of 4 (on a 0-5 scale) for the first time. Compared to Gallup's worldwide organizations, ChildNet rose from the 15th percentile in 2019 to the 47th percentile in 2024, and to the 62nd percentile among similar-sized organizations. The proportion of engaged employees has grown from 24% to 49% and actively disengaged employees have decreased from 25% to 7%. ChildNet now has a 7:1 ratio of engaged to disengaged employees, considered a best-practice benchmark. Discussion was held on the next steps. Overall, ChildNet has made considerable progress in employee engagement but aims to continue improving through targeted action and strategic planning.
- **Board Retreat** - Rebecca Brock discussed the upcoming Board Retreat, scheduled for Friday, February 28, 2025, from 10:00am-2:00pm, and mentioned that they are still seeking speakers. The initial facilitator could not commit due to a scheduling conflict, and a second recommendation also did not work out. However, two new recommendations were provided by board members, one of whom has been interviewed and seems like a strong candidate. This individual has significant corporate experience, is well-connected in the Palm Beach community, and is willing to do the work pro bono. The other recommendation, Jim Mueller, has worked with the board before and is a good option, but they are considering a fresh perspective from the first candidate. Once a facilitator is selected, the Board will receive an email with topics to prepare for the Retreat, including modifications to the mission statement, board engagement, rebranding, and a give-or-get strategy. There might also be some pre-retreat work required to help the facilitator prepare effectively.
- **Membership Recruitment:** Larry Rein informed the board that three applications have been sent out. However, delays occurred due to a statewide software update by the Agency for Healthcare Administration, which paused background screenings until recently. Although there was consideration to approve candidates pending background checks, Larry Rein and Colonel Benjamin agreed against it. Once finalized, the board should be near full capacity.
- **Legal/Human Resources Committee – Rebecca Brock, Committee Chair**

Discussion was held on the changes to the Legal/Human Resources Committee, which aims to improve efficiency by consolidating meetings and reducing overlap. A new Compliance Committee was implemented last year, and the Legal/HR Committee plans to integrate compliance updates, risk updates, and brief reports on litigation and employment cases into one meeting. This will make the committee's meetings more comprehensive. A decision has been made to include these topics in the next committee meeting.
- **Program Quality Committee – Nancy W. Stamper, Committee Chair**

The Program Quality Committee met and Julie Demar presented a proposed topic schedule for 2025, which included moving the Adolescent Services Committee updates to a quarterly slot within the Program Quality Committee meetings. The schedule also gave committee members an overview of the topics planned for the year. The second report, also by Julie DeMar, covered the DCF contract oversight, showing positive performance in both Broward and Palm Beach counties, with most targets being met or exceeded. The third report, by Larry Rein, focused on first-quarter census trends. It highlighted a decrease in dependent children in both counties, but the challenge remains in reducing residential group care. Additionally, removals in Broward have increased, though still low compared to historical numbers. Overall, the reports painted a positive picture of the efforts made to help children achieve permanency.



## BOARD CHAIR REPORT – Col. Josefa Benjamin

- Adoption Picnic – the picnic was held on November 2<sup>nd</sup> which highlights the importance of kinship care, and a picture of a family at the event was shared. The family, a grandmother and grandfather, care for six children, with two adopted so far. Col. Benjamin emphasized the significance of board members attending such events to connect with the families supported by ChildNet.
- National Adoption Day Broward – 11-23-24, where twenty-five children will be adopted, with twenty-two of them placed with relatives. The event will be held at the Broward Courthouse, and the first adoption ceremony will begin at 10:30 am. Col. Benjamin reflected on the heartwarming experience of attending adoption events, noting how it reinforces the board’s commitment to supporting the organization’s mission.

## CEO/PRESIDENT REPORT – Larry Rein

- **CBC Funding Methodology** – Larry Rein reported that there is a delay in the submission of KPMG's final report on the funding model, which was initially expected by December 1st. Mr. Rein mentioned a meeting with other executives and the DCF Assistant Secretary for Administration, where the situation regarding the report was unclear. DCF has indicated that its staff will continue working on the report over the holidays, and Mr. Rein expects to review it before it is sent to the Legislature. However, no new updates were provided.
- **Status of Responses to DCF Contract Amendment** - ChildNet has been asked to provide an interim report to the Department regarding our response to recent legislative changes and contract amendments. Key areas of focus include updating conflict of interest policies and procedures for both board members and staff, and addressing concerns raised by the Department and legislature. Additionally, board members will be required to complete updated conflict of interest disclosure forms, which will be distributed before the January 2025 board meeting.

The board will undergo several required training sessions, including governance and ethics, roles and responsibilities, legal obligations, and a more thorough training on conflict of interest identification, disclosure, and management. There will also be training on financial literacy, risk management, and preventing fraud, waste, and abuse, which has already been partially covered. There will be training focusing on strategic planning, which includes topics such as developing and implementing emergency response plans (with an existing continuity of operations plan available for review), understanding the child welfare system, and overseeing the responsibilities of the board of directors as required by DCF. Some of these topics can be covered during the Board Retreat, while others will be incorporated into annual training and made available through the Relias platform, allowing board members to complete them at their own pace. A deadline will be set to ensure compliance with contract amendments.

- **Legislative Update** – The Florida Legislature's new leadership is both promising and concerning. On the positive side, key leaders are strong supporters of community-based care. However, some legislators have expressed concerns about potential funding cuts. Representative Michael Gottlieb highlighted that although budget issues may be tight, there are possibilities for support due to leadership, particularly from incoming House Speaker Danny Perez, who is sensitive to mental health and community-based care issues. There is a funding challenge: the state’s Risk Pool only allocated \$3 million to cover deficits statewide, while Palm Beach’s deficit alone is \$2.4 million. Broward is applying for funding from this pool, but with a total statewide deficit of \$24 million, more support may be needed from the legislature.

## PUBLIC COMMENT

- There was no public comment.



**NEXT MEETING DATE**

- Friday, January 24, 2025, at 8:00 a.m. in person and via Zoom.

**ADJOURNMENT**

- Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:42 a.m.

*Lois Marino*

Lois Marino  
Board Secretary

1-31-2025

Date

(Corporate Seal)