

**Risk Pool Peer Review Committee Report**  
**ChildNet, Inc. – Broward County**  
**March 28, 2016**

ChildNet, Inc.<sup>1</sup> submitted a Notice of Intent to apply for Risk Pool Funding on December 4, 2015. The notice was reviewed by the DCF Southeast Region and was determined to meet the criteria to complete an application. ChildNet subsequently submitted an application for risk pool funding. The Southeast Region Contract Manager and Regional Managing Director concurred in the application on January 26, 2016 and the application was submitted to the Office of Child Welfare.

The department established a Risk Pool Peer Review Committee pursuant to section 409.990(7), F.S. and consistent with the department's Risk Pool Protocol of September 2, 2015.

The Risk Pool Peer Review Committee for ChildNet consisted of

John Aitken, CFO, Kids Central, Inc.  
Alissa Cross, DCF Office of Child Welfare  
Bill D' Aiuto, DCF Regional Managing Director, Central Region  
JoShonda Guerrier, DCF Office of Child Welfare  
Allison Hill, COO and former CFO, Lakeview  
Lee Kaywork, CEO, Family Support Services of North Florida, Inc.  
Mark Mahoney, DCF Office of Revenue Management  
Pam Menendez, USF Center for Child Welfare  
Barney Ray, DCF Office of CBC/ME Financial Accountability  
Teri Saunders, CEO, Heartland for Children  
Don Winstead, Team Leader

The Risk Pool Peer Review Committee reviewed the Notice of Intent and Application and assembled contextual information regarding caseloads, financial history and performance prior to the site visit. The Peer Review Committee conducted the site visit on February 10 through February 12, 2016.

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<sup>1</sup> As used in this report, ChildNet refers to the ChildNet Lead Agency contract in Broward County.

**The Peer Review Committee’s work was designed to meet the direction of the statute and departmental protocol in order to:**

1. Verify that the applicant meets the statutory criteria for eligibility which includes validation that the applicant’s financial need was caused by circumstances beyond the control of the Lead Agency’s management.
2. Determine if continued on-site technical assistance is appropriate.
3. Make a final recommendation to the Secretary regarding approval or disapproval of the application which may include access to the risk pool or other funding shifts to resolve the shortfall.
4. Determine the amount of funding and mix of funds to be made available.
5. Recommend specific limitations or requirements on the use of additional funds that are linked to correction of factors that caused the funding shortfall.
6. Identify any follow-up actions or additional documentation needed from the Lead Agency or Region, and
7. Report on any technical assistance activities completed and remaining and/or recommendations for future technical assistance.

**The work of the Peer Review Committee was organized in to seven areas and members of the committee looked in detail at issues in each of the following areas:**

1. Findings related to the need for services and commitment of resources
2. Findings related to protective services including removals, referrals for post-investigative services, activities to protect children without removal and use of resources focused on prevention and intervention.
3. Findings related to provision of services for children in care (both in-home and out-of-home).
4. Findings related to exits from care including exits to permanence.
5. Findings related to funding, fiscal trends and fiscal management.
6. Findings related to overall management.
7. Other factors or considerations noted on the application or determined relevant by the Peer Review Committee.

**The following summarizes the findings of the Peer Review Committee**

**1. Findings related to the need for services and commitment of resources**

1.1. What is the relevant community context within which the child welfare system operates?

In Broward County, the protective investigations function is performed by the Broward County Sheriff's Office (BSO) with the Children's Legal Services function performed by the Office of the Attorney General (AG). ChildNet, Inc. serves not only as the Lead Agency but also performs the case management function.

1.2. This may include incidence of calls to the hotline, child poverty in the area, local factors that influence the need for services, etc.

Broward County is the second most populous county in the state with over 1.8 million people in 2015<sup>2</sup>. There are almost 400,000 children in the county<sup>3</sup> and the rate of child poverty is below the state average<sup>4</sup>. The representative from BSO indicated that they receive about 1,177 intakes per month. The removal rate from July to September 2015 was 7.8 per 100 children investigated, compared to the statewide rate of 6.4 per 100 children investigated.<sup>5</sup>

1.3. Factors may also include community resources available to meet the needs of children and families such as Children's Services Councils, local governmental resources or other unique factors.

The Children's Services Council (CSC) is an important partner in the overall system of care in Broward County. The CSC provides \$9.2 million for prevention and diversion services targeted to children in the child welfare system. In addition, the CSC provides \$1.5 million in Independent Living services and \$600,000 in kinship supports. It was reported that the Managing Entity funds a family engagement program for BSO staff to link substance abusing parents to intervention treatment. The Family Intervention Team started in recent months and is collocated with BSO. There are domestic violence (DV) advocates and mental health staff housed at BSO and the DV advocate has recently begun helping with safety planning and training of child protective investigators.

BSO has a grant with the United Way to assist with the completion of the Comprehensive Behavioral Health Assessment (CBHA) when youth with developmental concerns are identified. This program also links eligible children to the Early Steps program. Recently ChildNet started a kinship support services program to help kinship families at post case closure. ChildNet also has a kinship support navigator on staff. This service has been in place about a year.

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<sup>2</sup> Florida Office of Economic and Demographic Research

<sup>3</sup> DCF Spinner Report

<sup>4</sup> Child Protection Summit Snapshot of the Child Welfare System, 2015

<sup>5</sup> Child Welfare Key Indicators Report January 2016

Apart from the Children Services Council, the Broward County Commission has a Children Services Board that funds a crossover project that serves 30 youth by providing them high fidelity wraparound services. This project has been in place a year and the Commission has agreed to fund the program for another year.

Additional community partners include HANDY, Helping, Abused, Neglected and Dependent Youth, whose mission is to support kids in relative settings. The Flight Center and the Junior League Legacy project are other programs, developed that benefit and serve the independent living (IL) population as a one-stop shop. Transitioning youth have access to GED classes, subsidized housing and Mommy And Me classes among other IL services. The Heart Alliance is also a strong partner in the system of care. They recently housed their 50th family by providing a life time voucher for subsidized housing. In total, there have been 45 children reunified as a result of this program. Kids in Distress, a local provider, also received a supportive housing grant through Health and Human Services (HHS).

As these examples illustrate, there is a robust array of both governmental and private organizations in Broward County that are involved in child welfare.

## **2. Findings related to protective services including removals, referrals for post-investigative services, activities to protect children without removal and use of resources focused on prevention and diversion.**

- 2.1. What are the rates of removal, rates of verification and other measures from protective investigations that affect the need for child welfare services? How have these measures changed over time and how do they compare with other areas of the state?

As indicated above, there were 7.8 removals per 100 children in reports for the period July 1 through September 30, 2015. Since September, the number of removals increased in October but declined substantially in November, December and January. Removals have increased over time and for the past several years, the removal rate has exceeded the statewide removal rate. For example, for the period where Broward's removal rate was 7.8 per 100 children investigated, the statewide rate was 6.4.<sup>6</sup>

- 2.2. What activities are in place to provide support to protective investigators and families to permit children to remain safe in their homes?

There are a variety of services in place to support protective investigators. Home builders is being used as a safety management service, as well as Henderson Mobile Crisis Unit and the Family Engagement Program. Most of these services are provided with resources that are outside of ChildNet's budget, with primary funding coming from the Children's Services Council. It was the observation of the Peer Review Committee that the services do not entirely conform to the department's Practice Model, however

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<sup>6</sup> Office of Child Welfare "Spinner" Reports

ChildNet believes these meet many of the needs of formal safety management services. ChildNet expressed reluctance to approach the Children's Services Council about aligning the services that they fund with the Child Welfare Practice Model, for fear that it would negatively impact their relationship. ChildNet expressed a desire to hire people to support the Council's service providers by doing the data entry, tracking the services provided and working more closely with families to provide the appropriate formal safety management services, but they just don't have the resources at this time.

BSO hired 16 child protective investigator (CPI) last year, but needed 25. Several individuals failed their psychological evaluation, BSO was not able to hire all that were under consideration for employment. Currently BSO has 12 CPI vacancies.

Key informants indicated that three investigators were arrested for falsification in the past year and one was arrested last week. This has reportedly affected the confidence with which investigators approach decision making and it is feared that this may affect decision-making including decisions related to removals.

2.3. What services are provided with funds used for prevention and diversion?

Because of the funds provided by the Children's Services Council, ChildNet does not use a significant amount of core services funds for prevention and diversion.

2.4. What evidence exists to show that investment in prevention and diversion services are, in fact, resulting in reduced flow of children into out-of-home care rather than just adding to the cost of services?

The CSC tracked information on child welfare re-entry following receipt of prevention/diversion services provided by CSC-funded agencies. These data reflect cases that closed between 10/01/13 and 9/30/14 and were followed for 12 months post completion.

The CSC compared CPI-referred cases to non-CPI referrals. The drop off rate is somewhat similar (48% and 52%). Of the successful completers, 9% of CPI-referred families recidivated within 12 months compared to 3% of non-CPI cases. Both numbers indicate the programs are having the intended preventive effect, at least through the first year following services.

Of note: the services include an array of programs including FFT, MST, Homebuilders, Nurturing Parent, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, and specialized services for children with special needs, among others.

Total CPI Referrals:	1,197	48% of total families closed
Successful CPI Completers Total:	819	68% of CPI referrals
Successful CPI Completers who Recidivated:	73	9%
Successful CPI Completers who DID NOT recidivate:	746	
Total Non-CPI Referrals:	1,297	52% of total families closed
Successful Non-CPI Completers Total:	945	73% of Non-CPI referrals
Successful Non-CPI Completers who Recidivated:	29	3%
Successful Non-CPI Completers who DID NOT recidivate:	916	

While the services provided by the CSC are a tremendous benefit to the child welfare system, the cases are not being recorded as Family Support Services cases in FSFN.

- 2.5. How well integrated are the CPI and diversion services components? Are there case transfer issues that affect performance?

ChildNet has two staff collocated with BSO to facilitate diversion services.

Cases are being closed, on average, at day 45 however case transfer processes are being initiated and completed within four days of the identification of present danger when a removal is the necessary safety action. At day four, information collection will likely be insufficient to correctly inform the safety determination and subsequent case activities. This will ultimately cause the case manager to make critical decisions, including the development of the child's case plan, with insufficient information to make appropriate service and/or treatment recommendations on behalf of the child. The purpose of the present danger safety plan is to keep the child safe while gathering information to determine the appropriate level of intervention. However, instead of engaging these additional measures, child protective investigators are most likely transferring cases prematurely, to redirect their focus during days five (5) through 45 to complete case documentation for the sole purpose of completing their investigations.

**3. Findings related to provision of services for children in care (both in-home and out-of-home).**

- 3.1. What is the composition of the children in care including age cohorts, placement types, use of specialized higher costs settings, use of congregate care, etc.?

There has been an increase in the average monthly number of children in out-of-home care of 1,035 and a corresponding increase to in-home care of 410 children<sup>7</sup>. Despite this increase, ChildNet has been successful in placing 63.5% of the removals in kinship care, 26.7% in licensed foster care, and only 6.2% in Residential Group Care (RGC).

Although the percentage of children in RGC has decreased over the past five years, from 19% to 12 %, the actual number of children has increased from 271 to 284. Considering the significant increase in out-of-home care, this is a remarkably low increase. The percentage of children served in kinship care has increased from 38% to 52%. The number of children served in licensed foster homes has increased from an average of 252 in 2010/11 to an average of 367 in 2015/16 (YTD).

ChildNet led the state in new foster homes and continues to place a strong emphasis on this placement type. The increase in removals has outpaced the increase in foster homes.

The average monthly removals have increased from 85 in 2011/12 to 115 in 2014/15. The average discharges per month have decreased slightly from 87 to 86. This gap has created the increase in out-of-home care.

Overall, the composition of children coming into care is fairly typical of the dependency systems in Florida. ChildNet is doing well with regard to accessing relative and nonrelative placements for children in care. Additionally, they have strong utilization of their foster home network. The percentage of core funding spent on group care is slightly higher than the state average and is projected to continue to grow in FY15/16. The cost for dependency case management is slightly under the state average and has been relatively consistent.

- 3.2. What is the cost of various placement types? To what extent are the rates paid for foster care (including care with various rates of intensity), congregate care consistent with statewide norms (considering community context)? Have these rates remained relatively consistent over the past few fiscal years?

ChildNet uses 19% of its core funding on RGC. This is projected to increase to 23% this fiscal year. These are higher than the state average of 15% and 17% respectively. ChildNet spends 16% of its core funding on foster homes. This is projected to go to 15%. These are both higher than the state average of 9%.

- 3.3. What is the cost for dependency case management? Is this consistent with norms for such services? Have these rates remained relatively consistent over the past few fiscal years?

Broward spent 45% of their core funding on dependency case management; this is expected to continue at this percentage. This is lower than the state average of 52% and

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<sup>7</sup> Office of Child Welfare “Spinner” Reports, June 30, 2013 to December 31, 2015.

50% respectively for SFY 14/15 and the projection amount for SFY 15/16. While the cost of dependency case management has been relatively consistent, the case management program is buckling under the pressure of steadily increasing removal rates and an inability to efficiently close dependency cases. The high case manager caseloads are driving less in depth work and are contributing to the Judiciary losing confidence in the system of care.

- 3.4. To what extent is the Lead Agency appropriately utilizing non-child welfare funding for services (such as DCF SAMH Funds, Medicaid, and other non-DCF funding sources).

ChildNet seems to make good use of non-child welfare funds. Broward has an active Child Services Commission which provides an array of services for children in the child welfare system, including a strong working relationship with the Broward Sheriff's Office to assist the Investigators with family support services, behavioral services, substance abuse/mental health services and other related services. The Managing Entity (ME) also provides funding for children and adults involved with child welfare. ChildNet uses Medicaid providers as needed.

- 3.5. What evidence exists that case management services are well-managed by the Lead Agency?

Case management services are provided by ChildNet. Caseloads are extremely high; 30+ children per case manager. This caseload size causes turnover and affects the quality of casework, visitations, case-planning, case closures and permanency.

#### **4. Findings related to exits from care including exits to permanence.**

- 4.1. What is the performance of the Lead Agency in the recognized measures of children achieving permanence? Do these findings indicate that children are not remaining in care for longer than necessary? Are these permanency achievement rates consistent across placement settings?

In considering exits, it is important to consider the impact of removals on children entering care. As indicated earlier in this report, ChildNet has the 4th highest removal rate per 100 children investigated at 7.2 compared to the statewide average of 6.1. They also have the highest verification rate per investigation at 27.1% compared to the average statewide at 17.6%.

Regarding permanency, ChildNet has the second lowest discharge rate among Lead Agencies at 3.8 per month per 100 children in care. This compares to the monthly statewide average of 5.2 per 100 children.

Permanency within 12 months of removal is the second lowest in the state. Those removed in 2012/13 are at 44.8% compared to the statewide average at 49.9%. Those removed in 2013/14 were at 37.3% compared to the statewide average of 47.4%.



Another key measure is children in care 12-23 months who achieved permanency. ChildNet performance for children in care as of 7/1/13, was at 37.8% compared to the statewide average of 53.3% and the national standard of 43.6%. For children in care as of 7/1/14, the rate was 45.3%; below the statewide average of 55.1%, but above the national standard of 43.6%.

A third measure of is children in care 24 or more months who achieved permanency. For children in care as of 7/1/13, 22.9% achieved permanency in ChildNet Broward compared to the statewide average of 39.9% and the national standard of 30.3%. For children in care as of 7/1/14, 30.4% achieved permanency compared to the statewide average of 39.2% and the national standard of 30.3%.

4.2. What contextual factors (such as Children’s Legal services, dependency court dynamics, etc.) influence time to permanence for children served by the Lead Agency?

The Peer Review Committee found a number of contextual factors which have negatively affected the child welfare system in Broward County and ChildNet directly:

There has been a high turnover in leadership at the Broward Sheriff’s Office – This has directly affected policy, acceptance of the new methodology, and relationships.

There have been changes at the Office of the Attorney General which have resulted in loss of experienced attorneys and adherence to policies that are more appropriate for criminal adjudication than child welfare.

There has been a high turnover in Guardian Ad Litem attorneys and volunteers causing the loss of experienced workers that the Judges relied on.

The Judicial caseloads are excessively high. There has been a turnstile of judges and the overall strain on the system has resulted in the judicial loss-of-confidence in the overall quality of the child welfare cases. This causes judicial delays, failure to close cases, increased caseloads for all parties, scheduling issues for child welfare cases, and long TPR trials (200+ days to decision).

The use of Public Defenders for parents and a change in payment method has resulted in long delays before a removal is adjudicated. This delays development, implementation of a case plan and services for the family. This also prevents permanency in a timely manner.

4.3. Has there been a change in number of exits or time to exit that is materially influencing the cost of out-of-home care?

Yes. As indicated above, exits have decreased at a time when removals have continued to increase. While there has been an increase in the number of exits in the current fiscal year, compared to the previous year, the exit rate is not sufficient to keep pace with removals. Based on in-depth discussions with ChildNet, Office of Attorney General,

Children’s Legal Services, and Department of Children and Families leadership, there appears to be a variety of contextual factors as described above that are seriously inhibiting the system’s ability to move children to permanency and exit the dependency system. Individuals interviewed by the Peer Review Committee described an underlying lack of confidence in the system by the Judges and General Magistrates. This was described as including case management, but also GALs and service providers and child protective investigators. This lack of confidence leads to delays in permanency for children and case closure. The result is ballooning caseloads for the case managers in the system.

**5. Findings related to funding, fiscal trends and fiscal management.**

5.1. How has core services funding changed over time? How has the Lead Agency managed these changes? What adjustments to the available array of services have been made?

<b>Broward County Core Funding History – Recurring and Non-Recurring Budget</b>				
Column->	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
State Fiscal Year	Recurring Core Services Funding	Non-Recurring Core Services Funding	Total Core Services Funding (Total of Columns A + B)	Carry Forward Balance Available
2010-2011	\$54,190,099	\$0	\$54,190,099	\$4,651,511
2011-2012	\$50,965,689	\$0	\$50,965,689	\$5,192,355
2012-2013	\$48,165,150	\$1,083,634	\$49,248,784	\$3,950,934
2013-2014	\$47,838,845	\$439,450	\$48,278,295	\$5,769,272
2014-2015	\$48,168,330	\$0	\$48,168,330	\$2,215,501
2015-2016	\$52,779,092	\$5,361,574	\$58,140,666	\$0
Footnotes or Comments	Non-recurring funding in FY15-16 from Back of the Bill for CBC operating costs deficits incurred in FY14-15.			

ChildNet has received a decrease in recurring core funding for four consecutive years since SFY 10/11. The recurring core funding has increased in the past two fiscal years, but is still less than the allocation in SFY 10/11. Broward received an additional \$5.3 million in non-recurring “Back of the Bill” funding for the SFY 14/15 core funding deficit in SFY 15/16. Over the same time frame, ChildNet had significant carry forward balances as high as \$5.7 million in SFY 13/14. All available carry forward was expended in SFY 14/15. ChildNet instituted reductions in staff, salary reductions, purchased and non-contractual services reductions and administrative reductions that they estimated totaled \$2 million in SFY 14/15. These reductions included a 4% reduction in residential group care rates.

5.2. How have any changes to core services funding contributed to any projected deficits for SFY 2015-2016?

ChildNet used carry-forward funds as continuation funding and reduced costs as indicated in section 5.1. However, ChildNet indicated that due to increased numbers of children coming into care, they restored their salary cuts to case management staff cut in SFY 14/15. They changed non-case management positions into case management positions to try and reduce caseloads. The case management function at ChildNet is performed in-house.

5.3. In what ways are funding dynamics in the Lead Agency unique or atypical of funding in other Lead Agencies?

The most unique feature of funding is that the Broward Children's Services Council is funding all of the front-end prevention efforts affecting child welfare in the county estimated at \$9.2 million annually. ChildNet historically has not funded any prevention or diversion services instead relying on those services funded by the Children's Services Council. Prevention services are critical in effectively mitigating the impacts of removal and placement to achieve higher level permanency and minimize the utilization of higher cost group care placements.

5.4. What is the amount of the anticipated deficit for the current year? How reliable and valid are these projections?

The Risk Pool Application identified a deficit of \$7.6 million but the latest projection received from ChildNet during the site visit now project a \$8.2 million deficit. The primary drivers for the deficit are an increase to the rate of removals, decrease to the rate of discharges and relatively high rate of placement in licensed residential group care (RGC).

The projected deficit contains an 8.5% increase or \$366,267 in Shelter and RGC expenditures over the last six (6) months of the fiscal year. The Peer Review Committee discussed each projection assumption with ChildNet and the assumptions appeared to be reasonable. In addition, ChildNet reported \$876,712 in expenditures during SFY 15/16 that were related to SFY 4/15 services that were not reported previously. The prior year expenditures were \$299,823 for RGC/Shelter, \$453,834 for Foster Home Management Providers, \$82,857 for Purchased Services, \$26,415 for case management and \$13,782 for non-contractual services.

5.5. Are there options other than Risk Pool funding available to reduce the deficit?

ChildNet stated they could earn more of the Title IV-E training dollars than currently allocated in the Broward contract if some were transferred from the ChildNet Palm Beach contract by swapping some other core funding in return. This would help the Palm Beach contract not have to return unearned federal funds at the end of the year. A potential exists for finding an alternate payment source for some placement and service costs either through the SAMH funded Managing Entity (MEs) provider network, Medicaid, Sunshine Managed Care State Plan and the Agency for Persons with Disabilities. The

Peer Review Committee recommends a deeper study of both the placement process and the potential to further maximize funding through these other programs. Based upon FSFN payment data, these types of costs total \$1.6 million of the \$12.7 million in out-of-home placement costs.

- 5.6. If the Lead Agency meets the criteria for Risk Pool funding, but the amount of funding available is insufficient to cover the projected deficit, what other options are available?

No other areas for cost reduction other than those mentioned in 5.5 above were identified. However, a greater utilization of foster homes and reduction in the reliance of residential group care for mild to moderate behavioral children would significantly reduce licensed care costs. Implementing this recommendation will not eliminate the deficit this year however it is crucial to the long term financial outlook beyond SFY 15/16. Absent an increase to the current available funding of Risk Pool or ChildNet seeking an increase from non-DCF sources for funding, ChildNet will have to carry forward any remaining deficit into the next fiscal year. Any allocation of Risk Pool funding helps ChildNet with cash flow through the remainder of the fiscal year.

- 5.7. Are there fiscal practices that could be completed with greater efficiency in order to reduce the projected deficit?

No fiscal practices were identified as contributing to the projected deficit however the Peer Review Committee recommends that ChildNet receive technical assistance from DCF on improving consistent usage of the FSFN financial module which will assist financial analysis by both the ChildNet and DCF.

- 5.8. Has the most recent CPA audit indicated any issues that would affect the financial health of the organization?

No findings or deficiencies identified in the June 30, 2015 CPA Audit.

## **6. Findings related to overall management.**

- 6.1. To what extent is there clear and effective communication between and among the Region, the Lead Agency, the Sheriff (if applicable), case management organizations and other key community partners?

There is clear and effective communication between the Region and the Lead Agency. While there is a long history of communication among the key partners in the Broward County system of care, there does not appear to be a common recognition of the need for more effective performance and a common commitment to change processes to improve outcomes.

A key challenge in Broward County is that the responsibility for essential components of the system of care is spread among several different entities including Broward Sheriff's Office for the Child Protective Investigation function, the Office of the Attorney General

for the Children’s Legal Services function, and the Lead Agency for Child Welfare functions. Unless there is a strong sense of community ownership of the child welfare system of care, different organizations may be accountable for parts of the system, but effective management of the overall system can suffer. The Peer Review Committee found that fragmented responsibility and authority in Broward County poses a significant barrier to system improvement. Failure to address issues affecting overall system performance threaten the long-term financial viability of ChildNet.

- 6.2. How actively and effectively does Lead Agency management track programmatic performance and fiscal performance?

ChildNet holds weekly meetings focused on their scorecard of key outcomes and on fiscal issues. Regional DCF team members attend these meetings.

The DCF Region hosts quarterly performance review meetings with representative from the Lead Agency, the Office of the Attorney General and BSO.

Information on performance and financial data is also reviewed at each meeting of the ChildNet Board of Directors.

- 6.3. What actions have been taken by the Region and/or the Lead Agency to resolve the fiscal issues without accessing the Risk Pool? What further actions are planned?

The Lead Agency and Region have taken a number of actions to resolve the current fiscal situation. These include a comprehensive review of DJJ crossover youth, shift in case management staff from secondary to primary roles to better distribute caseloads and reductions in administrative costs as discussed in section 5 of this report.

- 6.4. If potential corrective actions or technical assistance is recommended by the Peer Review Team, what is the commitment of the Region and the Lead Agency to follow through on those recommended actions?

The leadership of ChildNet and the Southeast Region expressed strong support and commitment to following through on the recommendations of the Peer Review Committee. All of the individuals providing information throughout the site visit were open, candid and entirely cooperative with the process.

### **Summary of Findings and Conclusions:**

- ChildNet – Broward’s current situation is a combination of factors including increased removals, and decreased discharges leading to a significant increase in the number of children in out-of-home care. This has occurred at a time when recurring core services funds declined from SFY 10/11 to SFY 14/15. While recurring core services funds increased in SFY 15/16, the total recurring funding remained below SFY 10/11.
- ChildNet has done a good job in placing children in the least restrictive environment, however, the high removal rate and low discharge rate has resulted in high caseloads,

higher costs, and declining quality. The Children’s Services Council provides great support to the child welfare system, but ChildNet needs to develop in-home services for unsafe children and for safety management to help alleviate some of the removals.

- A key challenge in Broward County is that the responsibility for essential components of the system of care is spread among several different entities including Broward Sheriff’s Office for the Child Protective Investigation function, the Office of the Attorney General for the Children’s Legal Services function, and the Lead Agency for Child Welfare functions. Unless there is a strong sense of community ownership of the child welfare system of care, different organizations may be accountable for parts of the system, but effective management of the overall system can suffer.
- The Peer Review Committee found a number of contextual factors to be relevant including turnover in key leadership in several of the entities as well as excessively high judicial caseloads. The result has been a child welfare system with delays in permanency and unacceptable high caseloads for case managers.
- While there are several actions that can be taken to improve the situation, the Peer Review Committee is not confident that these actions alone will resolve the underlying structural issues in Broward County.
- The current trends indicate that ChildNet is not on a path of longer term sustainability. While supplemental funding such as previously provided to cover the SFY 14/15 deficit and Risk Pool funding will avoid service disruptions this year, absent a significant infusion of resources, CBC – Broward is likely to experience a significant deficit next fiscal year.

### **Recommendations:**

The Risk Pool Peer Review Committee recommends that ChildNet receive Risk Pool funding contingent on their agreement to develop a corrective action plan to:

1. Ensure that Family Support Service cases are appropriately entered into FSFN.
2. Work with BSO and DCF to facilitate receipt of technical assistance from a peer Sheriff’s Office that performs protective investigations with support from the DCF Office of Child Welfare in key elements of the department’s practice model.

The Peer Review Committee does not find that these corrective actions will address the broader system-wide issues that were evident in the ChildNet review. The issue of long-term sustainability of the Community-Based Care lead agency in Broward County demands the attention of key leaders in Broward County. There is an urgent need to address the current trends and the inability of the system of care to respond to the needs of the volume of children and families needing to be served. In the absence of action to address the underlying issues affecting the entire system of care, the long-term financial viability of the ChildNet is at significant risk.

We recommend that the Secretary in cooperation with the Board of Directors of ChildNet convene a meeting of key leaders in each agency involved with child welfare along with other key community stakeholders to examine the operation of the current system of care and develop a coordinated plan to address the factors that are affecting child welfare in Broward.