



**Together in Partnership
Steering Committee
Monday September 29th, 2025
9:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.
2725 Judge Fran Jamieson Way, Building C, 1st
Floor, Commission Chambers, Brevard County, FL
32940**

Meeting Report

Members Present: Lisa Bradley, Chana Speir, Brett Carman, Traci Klinkbeil, Jean Bandish, MeriBeth Misch, Phil Scarpelli, Caroline Joseph Paul, Maria Bledsoe, Leigh McElroy, Gina Iannone, Omar Bohler, Amber Padrick, Gabrielle Bargerstock, Doug Reynolds, Rebecca Thibert, April Stack

At-Large Members Present: Sarah Slone, Terrell Melvin, Christina McPherson, Abigail Jones, Ruby Washington, Jessica Conti, Davine Vincent, Jeanie Raciti

Guests Present: Jacqui McPhillips, Elisabeth Bublitz, George Margoles, Melissa Brandt, Denise Devlin, Lily Fredrickson, Cindy Mitchell, Mackenzie Quirarte, Kim Wells, Laura McCarthy, Johnette Gindling, Ivette Collado

Call to Order/Introductions: The meeting was called to order by Leigh McElroy at 9:30 a.m. Introductions were made by everyone present.

Approval of Minutes: A motion was made to approve the July 28th, 2025, minutes, pending changes, and a second was made. The motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Updates: No chairman updates.

Anita Black and Juanita Jackson made an update on the Opioid Abatement RFA.

Elisabeth Bublitz from Tobacco Free Brevard presented on creating a safe and healthy community for children and how zoning policies reduce tobacco use.

Together in Partnership Reports:

1. **Family Strengthening/Infant Mental Health Task**

Force/Healthy Start Coalition: They did not have an update report this month. The meeting of the Family Strengthening work group was cancelled, and their next meeting is scheduled for November 15th.

2. **Child Abuse Prevention Task Force (CAPTF):** They are having their monthly meeting on October 16th and have a representative from the Early Childhood Development with Brevard Public Schools coming to speak for them. For their November meeting, they are having it on the 20th of November and will be having a representative from the Circles of Care outreach.

3. **Brevard Prevention Coalition (BPC):** As of August 18th, 2025, EMS reports that we have had 584 overdoses in Brevard, including 27 fatalities. For comparison, in the full month of August 2024, there were 1,100 overdoses and 35 deaths. Updated year-to-date figures will be shared at the next TIP meeting. Some concerns they have are that fentanyl remains the leading driver of overdoses; however, the rise of poly-substance use is heightening the risk, and meth use combined with fentanyl is increasingly common and often deadly. This pattern is confirmed by treatment providers and jail data. Stanley and Terrell are working with EMS and the jails to gather more details and stats for the next meeting.

They will be conducting a needs assessment to capture trends that may not appear in the current data. Terrell said that one barrier they are facing is that poly-substance overdoses are harder to reverse, and new synthetic stimulants may not be detected in toxicology tests. Naloxone distribution and overdose response training are helping, but they must be scaled up further. Some environmental stressors, such as the Florida heat, increase the risk for stimulant users, particularly those with health conditions who are engaging in poly-substance use.

Circles of Care highlighted their 24/7 access point in Melbourne and their mobile MAT program under the state's core initiative; core stands for coordinated opioid recovery. They stated that Health First is also exploring MAT medications and ERs. In addition, BPC is hosting addiction education sessions in the county jail. They are also working on developing ways to connect inmates directly to treatment and recovery support upon release, and several inmates have already expressed interest in their post-release recovery and treatment services. The addiction education classes that are offered in the jail have also been amazing and successful.

Terrell also mentioned the fact that they have a Move into Light family empowerment webinar where they talk about different topics, and their last topic was about how to navigate conversations around vaping with youth. They share different data points and give tips and tricks to parents to talk about that.

4. **Brevard Homeless Coalition (BHC):** They will be conducting their 2026 point-in-time count on January 22nd. They have yet to receive guidance from HUD, so they don't know 100% what that will look like, but they do collect consistent trend data, using the same metrics and methodology. Last year, they saw a 5% decrease in homelessness when a 1% increase in housing happened. Even just a little increase in housing really leads to a decrease in homelessness. BHC benchmarks the sheltered and unsheltered total count against their housing inventory count. Their housing inventory count is collected through their database, which is known as their homeless management information system. They look at it every year to make sure they have an accurate count of what their housing stock is in Brevard County. Last year, they noticed a decrease of 11% in their unsheltered population, a number that comes from their point-in-time count, noting that 43% of that are those who are chronically homeless. One thing they do not know, though, is the impact that the anti-camping and anti-public sleeping bill that went into effect last January 1st had on that, and they are going to see if they see that decrease again this year. There are a lot of things that they are going to consider when they do their 2026 point-in-time count, such as where those who are unsheltered are living, if they're in an encampment, in the woods, etc. 22% of the unsheltered residents have a serious mental illness, and 26% have a substance use disorder. They do track those things, and it has been a pretty consistent trend for the past two years. They find that one in three homeless individuals is fifty-five plus, and the age number seems to keep rising. They are seeing homeless women in particular in their sixties to seventies who are becoming homeless for the first time. 81% of unsheltered residents first lost housing in Brevard, and it is a pretty staggering statistic, meaning we are not importing homelessness or those who are homeless. They are not coming from other counties or other states. The homelessness is homegrown, and those who are part of that 81% became homeless in Brevard first, meaning this is a Brevard County issue. Those are just a couple of trends that were pulled from last year's point-in-time count, and we will see what trends the 2026 point-in-time count brings.

The problem they are running into is not having enough stock for affordable housing. They do not have enough of anything, meaning they don't have enough of their housing with supports for those who are earning maybe 30-60% of their median income. They don't have all of the housing stock that you would typically see, and are in need of more affordable housing in general. They will be rolling out emergency shelter buses that will service all of Brevard County, which means 60 beds for a population of around 700 unsheltered individuals. They need more support. Addressing these concerns does pose some barriers, though. The affordable housing development and financing process is a very long process. It is a two to three-year-long process. They need more affordable housing developers to come and help in the County, as well as more local community-based support, like emergency shelters. They also need more advocates to say that they support having more emergency shelters and having affordable

housing developments. More advocates, more affordable housing, and more emergency shelters are what they really need.

They also survey some different populations, such as the jails and the schools. Even though school data collects homeless data differently than they do, it's still very important to report to the community because it creates an overall picture.

5. ***Brevard Family Partnership d.b.a Family Partnerships of Central Florida:*** For case management distribution, they regularly evaluate, even beyond the procurement of contracts for the lead agency to contract with private agencies to do the dependency case management. They have four counties: Brevard, Seminole, Orange, and Osceola. In Osceola County, they have Gulf Coast Jewish Services, and in Orange County, they have Camelot Community Care, and recently, they brought in Thompson Family Focus to Seminole County. They also still have Family Allies in Brevard County, who have been doing case management for the last twenty years. The majority of those with whom they are doing contract work with are doing adequately with the benchmarks set forth by the state government and federal government, as well as what is expected for the performance of dependency case managers. It's all predicated on how well they do categorically in the areas of safety of children, per the well-being of the needs of the children holistically, and then permanency, predominantly reunification, but also there is adoption and the work that is done in foster care. They are always looking for foster families. The capacity of foster families has never met the capacity of need. Child Welfare League of America did a national study on how many in the community and where foster children are to be placed, and how many placements are recommended for the agency that oversees it. Family Partnerships of Central Florida is a child placement agency, and there is a 3:1 ratio expectation, which has never happened because they want to match children with families. Everybody has a preference, or a skill set better suited to work with teens, young, female, male, etc., and they are looking to ramp up their marketing efforts. They do this in concert with the Department of Children and Families. They talk about the how and why, and the strategy around that.

There will be more to check out on the website, which is familypartnerships.org, concerning strategies around marketing. They will be doing podcasts and doing testimonials to give people a taste. They also always introduce families in an intro night session about the journey in fostering here in Florida. In relation to placing folks who are at risk of being homeless, it's no secret that children who are aging/aged out of foster care are often very much at risk of being homeless. They are partnering with Wings of Grace Ministries, Ways for Life, local developers, and the County to build units, and there are twenty-four units built so far in Melbourne for youth who have been in foster care for six months or more at any point in their life, as well as children who are exiting foster care and need placement. They have created a board of directors, and Phil Scarpelli is on that board. They are looking at 24 to 56 additional units in this county and are trying to

get just shy of 100 in order to meet the needs of the subpopulation of people who could otherwise be unhoused.

- 6. CareerSource Brevard Flagler Volusia:** One of their locations is closing effective October 10th. In addition, they're moving to three local talent hubs in the Cocoa area. They'll be offering some limited services there and case management for the most part. They are currently in the Family Promise Firehouse location and have been there since September 22nd. A staff member will be there on Mondays and Wednesdays from 9 AM to 5 PM, and on Fridays from 1 PM to 5 PM. Next, they will be moving into Eastern Florida State College by October 6th, and will be there Monday through Thursday, 9 AM to 6 PM. The third location will be at the adult ed Clearlake campus, open Monday through Thursday from 9 AM to 6 PM and Fridays from 8 AM to 3 PM. All locations are appointment-only. As they move into the hubs, this information is being placed on their website so anyone can view it. They still have the two other centers: the large center in Palm Bay and another center in Titusville. They have an opioid grant, called the Recovery Works grant, and it is scheduled to end in December 2026. Caroline thanked the partners who are sending them referrals through Crosswalk. She says they appreciate them for engaging in that way while they try to engage the public for the grant.

They are looking to host an intern and have two programs under the umbrella of interning. The first one is work experience, where they pay 100% of the participant's wage through a staffing agency, and that agency is contracted with a workforce board, and the funding that they're using is workforce funding. The other program is on-the-job training, where workforce funding can be used to pay up to 50% of an individual's wages for up to six months. The only issue with this is if you plan on hiring anyone under these two programs, the individual has to be eligible, and that takes time for them to test for eligibility, and they cannot start working at the location before getting the approval from Career Source Brevard Flagler Volusia. If interested in either program, send the individual's name, telephone number, contact information, and their address to Caroline Joseph Paul, and she will have the individual referred to another staff member to assess their eligibility.

She thanked both Stanley Brizz from Brevard Prevention Coalition and Valerie Brooks from Circles of Care for making excellent presentations to the staff of Career Source Brevard Flagler Volusia, regarding substance use and mental health services in Brevard County. She also thanked Laura McCarthy for allowing them to participate in the Brevard Recovery Fest.

- 7. Domestic Violence Task Force:** The Domestic Violence Task Force met on August 21st, and they had speakers about the child welfare, Collocated Domestic Violence Advocate Project here in Brevard County. On October 9th, they are having a meeting in the Space Coast Room at noon to talk about domestic violence in the workplace. They

are going to discuss the big picture about how they can look at the workplace and be helpful, and everyone is encouraged to attend.

8. ***Florida Department of Children & Families:*** DCF has a statewide website where they track all of their data and their trends statewide, locally, and by county. A lot of those safety, permanency, and well-being measures are tracked there, as well as things they do for investigations. An example that was made was how they track if they are commencing timely within 24 hours, seeing their child victims within that time, their staff ratios, etc. Another thing they track is their number of investigations. In August, they received 583 investigations in Brevard County, meaning in the past 12 months, that could be anywhere from 530 to 670 a month. The number of investigations depends on different factors, such as whether school is in session, etc. In August, they had 21 children enter out-of-home care, which is a low number, and they're seeing that trend statewide, and their entries are coming in at a lower number as well. They are doing a lot on the prevention side and have domestic violence advocates sit within the service centers with the investigators, so that way, if they receive a domestic violence case, they can talk to the advocates and get some guidance on how to address that. Exits from out-of-home care are cases that end up in case management, and they go through the court process. They had 38 exits, which was higher than the number in July, which is good. Cares does a lot of front-end prevention work with DCF with safety management services in order to keep the children in the home safely.

Even if they aren't removing, there are still barriers with the families that they are seeing and concerns that they need to address, such as substance misuse, mental health issues, etc. Substance misuse is an actual maltreatment that they can track and give data on, and while mental illness is not a maltreatment, it can lead to a lack of housing, substance misuse, etc. These are all things that they track to see why the children are coming into their care. Another thing that they track is the number of fatalities that occur. These are deaths that come to the DCF hotline because there's a concern for potential abuse, neglect, or abandonment regarding that fatality. As of September 26, 2025, they had 12 in Brevard. 4 were drowning, 4 were sleep-related, 2 were natural causes, and 2 are still open and under investigation. They had one in August, which was a 4-month-old infant that was found unresponsive in the crib. Those are the kinds of things that come through to the hotline. Majority of those are not verified findings, which means they're not determined to be the parents' fault of abuse and neglect. They do all sorts of deep dive data, and the water safety to see what and why these distractions are happening. When it's a verified report, however, it's usually because parents were under the influence at the time, such as being asleep in the house, the child got out and drowned, co-sleeping, under the influence of something, etc. They do fatality reviews every month, and they review every fatality as a quality assurance. They're finding THC to be a factor in a lot of these fatalities. They do drug screens during

fatalities, so they know what's happening, and it's still something they're looking at on the data side.

They just had their annual Family and Children Summit in Orlando. It's a huge, statewide event, and they have tons of workshops there. They're doing a lot of work on protocols, processes, and how to really get involved with those families as early as possible, so they don't get to the point where they tell DCF to come get the child because they aren't picking them up or that they can't come home. In addition, housing and placement types are another barrier they're seeing.

9. ***Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ):*** They have 151 kids currently on probation in Brevard County, 379 on intake status, 8 kids that are being supervised under electronic monitoring, and 17 kids that are under DJJ's intensive supervision program. Some barriers they're having are pretty parallel to DCF's barriers. They have respite concerns as far as the kids, especially the domestic violence kids, as well as lockout concerns, meaning the child is no longer welcome in their own home. They also have issues with transitions, adequate housing for that child, finding placements, etc. Communication between their agencies, Guardian Ad Litem, and their relationship with DCF has increased as well, which is helping with those issues. They have quarterly training now to really work on scenario-based cases so that they can reverse engineer and see where one agency starts, where they stop, and where the other agency picks up, to really facilitate communication and coordination between the agencies and the families and the child that may be involved.

On the Juvenile Justice Circuit Advisory Board meeting front, they had their committee meetings on September 25, 2025. They have two committees: the pre-arrest delinquency citation committee and the student achievement committee. On the pre-arrest delinquency side, utilization for that program is at 44% and they're trying to drive that utilization up. They want to reassess the data related to pre-arrest delinquency citation. There was also a conversation related to statute and the exclusionary things, and there's one exclusionary, which is a firearm charge for a misdemeanor child. They are really trying to look at the different ways they can increase utilization. The domestic violence cases are one of them because if you take a look at a circuit, like circuit 11, for example, they have 96% utilization on their DV cases. One thing that might help them is to have conversations with law enforcement partners. They do have an interagency agreement that is due to be renewed, and they do have a blanket of the new one that they are currently working on. At their next Juvenile Assessment Center meeting, they're going to have conversations with the juvenile chief state attorney and show what the research is showing. The research is showing that disposition, despite these kids are not being offered it, they're still being disposed to a diversion program. So, it only makes sense to get that child that opportunity three months, six months, and maybe a year in advance before they incur any other charges, or some services have not been deployed that could have

been deployed sooner. The next meeting is on October 23rd, 2025, at 1:30 PM at Crosswinds.

- 10. National Center for Innovation and Excellence:** They just wrapped their first year with the Brevard Behavioral Health Expansion grant. The goal of the grant is to enhance the system of care for children or families who have children with emotional disturbances. They want to look at the entire system of care and come up with creative ways that are sustainable in order to enhance that system. They had 109 participants who were referred for care coordination. 100% of those participants received those services. They had 6 out of 7 participants referred for diagnostic and evaluation services receive those services. 1 out of 2 participants referred for childcare received services. 10 out of 10 received outpatient services. 9 out of 9 received intensive home-based services, and 12 out of 12 for respite. Overall, 99% of participants received the help that they needed. In the larger system of care, they saw 70% of the system population referred and receive diagnostic and evaluation services. Those who didn't, doesn't mean that they haven't or won't. It might mean that it's something they're looking into, or it's a timing issue where they didn't receive the service within that quarter, and they received it the next quarter, or more diagnostic and evaluation services are needed. This is another item that they will be continuing to look into.

Another next step for the grant is to look into respite. They do have some churches that are providing a form of respite, maybe once a month. Those churches have been contacted, and they saw that they only have one that's participating in this particular program. The goal is to reach out to the churches that were participating to see what the National Center can do to have them start back doing it, and to increase it. They would like to have something going on at a church in Brevard for respite for families with children with emotional disturbances, at least every Saturday of the month. Another thing that they're looking closely into is having a space to bring providers and children's advocates, and everyone to the table to discuss specifically children's mental health in Brevard.

Unfinished Business: No unfinished business.

New Business: Reschedule the November meeting to a different date, due to Thanksgiving being the same week as the original meeting date.

Public Comments:

Laura McCarthy – Brevard Recovery Fest: Brevard Recovery Fest was a success this year. The next fest will be next September 12, 2026. They will also be doing a mental health event on May 12, 2026. They will have primary mental health providers and offer CEUs in the morning, as well as panelists in the afternoon. It will be held in the Melbourne Auditorium. She shouted out Recovery Connections of Central Florida, an organization that is about to open up two new drop-in centers in Brevard that will offer

resources for anyone struggling with a substance use disorder. That will be located at 1676 W. Hibiscus Blvd., Melbourne, FL 32901. Mid-October is when that one is looking to be open, and there will be one in Titusville that is opening up as well. That one is located next to Groups Recover Together. On December 13th, there will be a fundraiser walk to end the HIV epidemic through Unconditional Love, Inc.

Laura also discussed with the committee the topic of her joining the TIP board as a member at large and also serving on the recommendations committee.

Motion to adjourn with a second.

The meeting adjourned at 11:11 a.m. The next meeting will be on **November 10th, 2025, at 9:30 am,** at 2725 Judge Fran Jamieson Way, Building C, Commission Chambers, 1st Floor.