



Northeast Regional Behavioral Health Interagency Collaboration

November 20, 2025, 11:00am

Virtual via Teams

MEETING MINUTES

Attendance: 90 participants

Host/Facilitator:

Department of Children and Families Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health (SAMH) – Harlee James, Regional Collaboration Coordinator; Idris Gaines, Regional Operations Manager; Cara Thomas-Bry Operations Supervisor; Stephanie Groth, Administrative Assistant

Presenter:

Dr. Christine Cauffield, Chief Executive Officer, Lutheran Services Florida Health Systems (LSFHS)

Full Attendee List is Provided in Appendix A

I. CALL TO ORDER

Harlee James called to order the Northeast Region Behavioral Health Interagency Collaboration meeting at 11:00 AM

II. WELCOME

Harlee James welcomed the attendees, introduced the DCF SAMH staff and Dr. Cauffield

III. PRESENTATION – LUTHERN SERVICES FLORIDA HEALTH SYSTEMS

Dr. Cauffield presented the Behavioral Health Needs Assessment from LSF Health Systems covering:

- Service Area
 - Methodology
 - Behavioral Risk Factors Surveillance System (BRFSS)
 - Florida Youth Substance Abuse Survey (FYSAS)
 - Uninsured Statistics
 - Mortality Statistics
 - Mental Health America State of Mental Health State Rankings
 - LSF Utilization Data
 - Community Input
 - Identification of Key Themes and Issues
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- Strategic Priorities

Dr. Cauffield concluded her presentation with contact information for herself and Shelley Katz, LSFHS Chief Operating Officer.

Question and Answer:

Karen Chrapek from Volusia Recovery Alliance asked for insights and next steps regarding the exemption process and the workforce barriers it creates.

- Response: **Dr. Cauffield** explained to the group that Peer Specialists must complete a level 2 background screening when entering the workforce and if they have prior legal charges, this acts as a barrier. She noted that Senator Darryl Rouson has passed legislation to ease some of these requirements while acknowledging that additional progress is needed. She recommended continued engagement with Senator Rouson on this initiative.

Deborah Sibley from Kids Hope Alliance asked if the Needs Assessment would be available after the meeting.

- Response: **Harlee James** confirmed that the presentations would be sent to attendees following the meeting.

Dr. Courtney Whitt introduced herself as the Executive Director of the Florida Center for Behavioral Health Workforce, which works to address regional workforce needs identified in the Needs Assessment. She emphasized that the Center is needs driven and community grounded and welcomed continued feedback from partners. She described an interactive dashboard on the Center's website that provides data on the current behavioral health workforce and noted that the dashboard is currently being expanded. She explained that this resource can support progress tracking, grant development, and legislative discussions. Dr. Whitt also announced a December forum focused on psychiatric mental health nurse practitioners and she shared her contact information in the chat.

IV. IMPACTFUL MOMENTS

Harlee James shared impactful moments from the Northeast Region.

- An Impactful moment from Child Guidance Center highlighted the wide range of services offered at the agency along with the growth of its Mobile Response Team made possible through support from LSF Health Systems.



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- An Impactful moment from Gateway Community Services highlighted the expansion of its recovery services made possible through strong support from LSF Health Systems.

V. NEXT STEPS AND 2026 VISION

Idris Gaines provided an overview of the 2025 Northeast Regional Behavioral Health Interagency Collaboration events. He reviewed:

- Quarterly Meetings
- Participant Attendance
- Positive Collaboration
- Stakeholder Feedback

Idris also discussed next steps and the 2026 vision, which include:

- The continuation of the Statewide Lunch and Learn series. Highlighting that the next Lunch and Learn will be held on December 11, 2025, with Coordinated Opioid Recovery presenting.
- Upcoming Quarterly Regional Behavioral Health Interagency Collaboration Meetings. Sharing that the next meeting will take place on January 15, 2026, at the Alachua County Public Library Tower Road Branch in a hybrid format. The address for the Alachua County Public Library is 3020 SW 75th St, Gainesville, FL 32608.
- The need for impactful speakers in future meetings and a request for feedback on topics and presentations.
- The development of outcome driven workgroups focused on critical needs identified in survey data.

VI. PUBLIC COMMENT

Shannon Robinson spoke about her family's experience seeking support for her son's behavioral health needs. She shared that although the situation began one year ago, her family continues to face difficulty accessing appropriate services. She asked whether additional resources might be available in the future for families who experience complex behavioral health crises within the home. In response to a question about her location from Dr. Cauffield, Shannon described the challenge of securing the specific services her son required due to the absence of initial legal involvement. She explained that once the legal system became involved, she encountered significant obstacles related to insurance costs plus the need to demonstrate medical necessity for a residential program. She noted that



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the CBC provided assistance with program expenses. Shannon concluded by expressing that many families in the community face similar barriers when they attempt to locate appropriate services or navigate insurance requirements.

- **Idris Gaines** acknowledged Dr. Cauffield's raised hand and invited her to address the question. Idris also asked whether any additional providers on the call could offer support. **Dr. Cauffield** shared that LSFHS serves individuals who are uninsured or underinsured, and that through the LSFHS network of care, funding is provided to support access to services. Dr. Cauffield introduced child specialist, **Erica Machnic**, provided her contact information in the chat so that Shannon could connect with her regarding next steps.

Dan Renaud with New Hope Addiction and Education Services, Inc. reported that overdose rates among BIPOC youth and adolescents are rising, and that substance use is occurring at younger ages. He noted that services for adolescents and preadolescent youth remain underfunded, which significantly affects educational outcomes, increases the risk of unintended pregnancies, and heightens vulnerability to human trafficking. He asked whether there would be an opportunity to begin addressing this issue more aggressively.

A question was read from Erin McVicker with Wolfson Children's Hospital, who asked whether there were available mentor programs in St. Johns County for teens who have aged out of foster care or were adopted through DCF, and who are now experiencing homelessness while pursuing college or entering the workforce.

- Response: **Harlee James** shared with Erin, that she would send her resources in that area for mentorship programs after the meeting.
- Response: **Hope Walton** from Flagler OARS added that she has had positive experiences using Port in the Storm, which is a Homeless Youth Center.
- Response: **Dr. Cauffield** shared the 24/7 LSF Health Systems Access to Care Line, which can provide information on available resources. She placed the contact information in the chat and shared it verbally during the meeting.

Gregory Stewart from UF Health Psychiatric Hospital shared that he previously participated in an interagency collaboration that created a community resource guide outlining available services. He suggested this as a helpful idea for a future subgroup.

- Response: **Idris Gaines** invited Gregory Stewart to contribute his experience to one of the subgroups as they are developed.



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VII. CLOSING REMARKS

Harlee James thanked meeting participants for their engagement and valuable feedback. She encouraged attendees to reach out with any follow up questions and provided contact information for Idris Gaines and herself. She expressed appreciation for the group's continued commitment to meaningful, collaborative change.

Idris Gaines provided an overview of the foundation developed by the collaboratives in 2025, and he discussed the key focus points for 2026, that include workgroup formation. He followed with a thank you to the group for their continued service.

Harlee James closed the meeting with a final thank you to all attendees.

VIII. ADJOURN

Harlee James adjourned the meeting at 12:25 PM

Minutes Submitted by: Harlee James



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APPENDIX A

Adam	Hiers	Levy County Sheriff's office
Alex	Culbreth	CDS Family & Behavioral Health Services, Inc.
Amanda	Morgan	Lime Counseling
Andrea	Douglas	Department of Juvenile Justice
Angie	Adams Martin	CMS Sunshine Health Plan
April	Busby	Department of Children and Families SAMH
Ariel	Drescher	Alachua County Crisis Center
Brad	Hill	Department of Children and Families
Brock	Birtolo	Flagler OARS / Discover & Recover
Cara	Bryant-Thomas	Department of Children and Families SAMH
Carol	Gardiner	E-Nini-Hassee
Carrie	Baird	Flagler Cares
Cassandra	Jackson	Elder Source
Chelsey	Jones	Optum
Cheryl	Virta	NAMI Jacksonville Florida, Inc.
Christa	Barton	CMS Sunshine Health
Christine	Cauffield	Lutheran Services Florida Health Systems
Christy	Gillis	Department of Children and Families
Chrystyn	Adams	LifeStream Behavioral Center
Cori	Mcdaniels	Sunshine Health
Courtney	Horton	Department of Children and Families
Courtney	Whitt	Florida Center for Behavioral Health Workforce
Dan	Renaud	New Hope Addiction and Education Services, Inc.
Dana	Huggins	SEDNET
David	Williams	Parent
Deanna	Uhl	Flagler County Sheriff's Office
Deborah	Sibley	COJ - Kids Hope Alliance
Deborah	Richmond	Eckerd Connects E-Nini-Hassee
Dennis	Maneja	SAYS
Derron	Moose	UF Health St Johns BHRC
Diana Burgos	Garcia	Agency for Persons with Disabilities
Diveka	Anderson	Department of Children and Families SAMH
Dusty	Pye	Lutheran Services Florida Health Systems



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Emilie	Ellenberg	Florida Center for Behavioral Health Workforce at USF
Erica	Machnic	Lutheran Services Florida Health Systems
Erin	McVicker	Wolfson Children's Hospital
Erin	Whitaker-Houck	Lutheran Services Florida Health Systems
Gregory	Stewart	UF Health Psychiatric Hospital
Hope	Walton	Flagler OARS, Discovery and Recover
Jennifer	Johnson	Florida Behavioral Health Association
Jennifer	Nitschmann	UF Health
Jesse	Kemper	Department of Children and Families
Jessica	Davis	Gateway Community Services
JoeAnn	Gadley	Parent
Karen	A Chrapek	Volusia Recovery Alliance
Karrie	Dolan	UF Health St Johns/BHRC
Kendra	Wagner	Baptist Behavioral Health
Kimberly	Barrett	Children's Home Society of Florida
Kristy	Amburgey	Flagler Cares & One Voice for Volusia
Laura	Klock	School Board of Levy County
Lesley	Hersey	Lutheran Services Florida Health Systems
Linda	Macdonald	Florida Behavioral Health Association
Linda	Spadaro	Baptist Health System
Lindsay	Thompson	UF Health St. Johns- BRAVE
Lindsey	Patrick	Lutheran Services Florida
Lizette	Miller	Department of Children and Families
Majesyu	Bisda	UF Health St. Johns Care Connect
Marie	Norman	Florida Blue
Mckena	Johnson	Day Spring Health
Meghan	Riley-Reynolds	Lutheran Services Florida Health Systems
Melanie	Mitchell	Department of Children and Families
Melinda	Sczepanski	Partnership for Strong Families
Melissa	Trentham	Department of Children and Families
Mendi	Varnado	Mental Health Resource Center
Michael	Key	Neptune Beach Police
Nangela	Pulsfus	Epic Behavioral Healthcare
Nicole	McAtee	Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health
Olivia	Hollier	Alachua County Sheriff's Office



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Patrick	Heidemann	Disability Rights Florida
Patrick	Stallwood	BAYS Kids
Paula	Willacy	Department of Children and Families
Philip	Kabler	CDS Family & Behavioral Health Services, Inc.
Regina	Roberts	Better Together
Regina	Ford	UF Health Jacksonville
Robert	Sommers	Mental Health Resource Center
Rosalina	Stelma	Nassau County School District
Sabrina	Howland	Bradford County School District
Salvatore	Gintoli	SMA Healthcare
Sandra	Woodard	Early Learning Coalition of the Nature Coast
Shannon	Robinson	Parent
Sheena	Etienne	Baptist Medical Center
Stacey	Rowe	Children's Home Society of Florida
Stephanie	Groth	Department of Children and Families SAMH
Suzanne	Mailloux	NAMI Jacksonville
Tara	Bryant	Optum
Theresa	Rulien	Child Guidance Center
Timothy	Macsuga	Universal Health Services, INC
Tonya	Harrison	Department of Children and Families
Trina	Kucera	Sunshine Health
Wesley	Ordonez	Department of Children and Families