



State of Florida  
Department of Children and Families

Ron DeSantis  
Governor

Chad Poppell  
Secretary

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## **MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** March 20, 2020  
**TO:** Members of the Palm Beach Area Refugee Task Force  
**FROM:** **Miriam Rosario**, Refugee Services (RS)  
**SUBJECT:** March 20, 2020 Meeting Minutes

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### **THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR:**

**Date:** May 21, 2020  
**Time:** 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM  
**Location:** TBA  
**Contact:** **Miriam Rosario**  
**Office:** (561) 227-6722  
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**E-Mail:** [Miriam.rosario@myflfamilies.com](mailto:Miriam.rosario@myflfamilies.com)

This task force has been active in the Palm Beach area in the past few years. The participants are representatives of various government agencies, private not-for-profit organizations and volunteer groups. An average of about twenty to twenty-five attend these meetings on a regular basis. The purpose of these meetings is to increase awareness of the refugee populations, share best practices, build collaborations between agencies, spot trends in refugee populations, characteristics or movements, help create good communication among service providers; get informed about upcoming community events, request for proposals, training, workshops, conferences, etc., at the local, state and national level; discuss refugee program service needs and possible solutions to meeting those needs. Meeting participants also receive updates, information and clarification on new federal and state regulations and policy changes pertaining to refugees.

If there are any issues that you would like to include in the agenda, please contact me at the above address.

*I look forward to seeing you at the meeting!*

Southeast Region - Circuit 15  
111 South Sapodilla Avenue, West Palm Beach, FL 33401

**PALM BEACH AREA COUNTY REFUGEE TASK FORCE MEETING****INTRODUCTION**

The meeting was held via a conference call and Miriam Rosario, Southeast Region (SER) Community Liaison, Refugee Services (RS) Program, Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) facilitated the meeting. Miriam thanked and welcomed all participants for joining the meeting during these challenging times. The Task Force observed a moment of silence for all those affected worldwide by the spread of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19). The meeting was called to order and participants introduced themselves and the agencies they represented. Approximately 30 people joined the call.

**SPECIAL PRESENTATION**

On behalf of “Alive and Well Community Partners”, Miriam provided an overview of the services that organization offers to the community. Some of these services include: AIDS Drug Assistance Program Treatments, AIDS Pharmaceutical Assistance, and Early Intervention Services (EIS). The organization can be reached at 1-800-434-1366, Extension 1008; Email: npnoguera.aliveandwell@gmail.com

**NEW ISSUES/ACTION TAKEN**

Oscar Rivera, director of Church World Service (CWS) in South Florida, provided an overview of the Comprehensive Refugee Services (CRS) program. He discussed how CRS services and referrals would be implemented in both Broward and Palm Beach counties. He described all CRS services including the RS Assessment, Tiered Case Management, Employment, Legal Services, Career Laddering, Adult Education, Child Care, and Mentoring services. He explained that the mentoring program would serve youth ages 15 to 24. Mentoring services will include services such as education and school guidance, gang prevention, and pairing students with university-level mentors that can provide support/guidance. All referrals from the community for refugee services should go directly to the CWS CRS program. The CWS/Palm Beach contact staff are Francisco Figueroa (Administrator) and Edele Firmin (Coordinator). The CWS CRS program will work with Career Sources to complete work registration requirements.

**GENERAL UPDATES/ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

**USCIS**, Don Jarrell, Community Relations Officer (CRO), U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, participated in the meeting. Don spoke about USCIS and services during the Covid-19. USCIS offices are closed but are still accepting the forms by email and mail. All interviews, naturalization ceremonies and biometric collection appointments are postponed. However, USCIS will continue to provide emergency services during this time. For an emergency service request, please contact the USCIS Contact Center. Employees in these offices are continuing to perform mission-essential services that do not require face-to-face contact with the public. USCIS field offices will be sending notices to applicants and petitioners with scheduled appointments impacted by the public closure.

**ESS/DCF-** Gus Artau, Community ACCESS Partner Liaison, gave updates on ACCESS and benefits. He explained that DCF storefronts are offering drop boxes where clients can physically leave applications and other documents. Staff will retrieve these documents daily. Documents can also be emailed or faxed. He explained that the ACCESS self-service portal allows clients to reapply for DCF benefits online as well as report changes, check the status of a benefit application, and review approved benefits. He explained that individuals can apply for benefits online through: <https://www.myflorida.com/accessflorida/>. Additional information can be found on DCF's website.

**RS/DCF** – David Draper, DCF Refugee Services Community Liaison Manager, gave updates. He encouraged taskforce members to review/follow CDC guidelines. DCF RS will also be hosting weekly refugee services contracted provider conference calls to get updates from providers on the current state of operations. It was noted that DCF will be launching a COVID-19 information page soon (<https://www.myflfamilies.com/covid19/>). DCF ACCESS storefronts will be closing, but applications for benefits will continue online. If any applicants have questions, they can still contact DCF customer services: 1-850-300-4323 (available 8am to 5 pm, Monday to Friday). Refugee Task Force meetings will be conducted via phone conference for the months of March and April (and until further notice). Because of DCF travel restrictions, community liaisons will be conducting client engagement via phone with refugees. Regarding the DCF Refugee Services AmeriCorps VISTA program, recruitment and onboarding has been suspended through May (this decision was made by the Corporation for National and Community Services - CNCS). DCF RS will continue to send updates via email to refugee task force members. Miriam also reminded taskforce member to update their services and contact information with 211.

**CareerSource Palm Beach County-** CareerSource was not present at this meeting. However, up-to-date information regarding office hours and services can be viewed on their website: <https://careersourcebroward.com/>

**Palm Beach County Sheriff (PBSO)-** Marcia Bahia, M.S., Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office, Gang Prevention Coordinator was going to offer a virtual workshop regarding Gang Prevention for youth (and their parents) in the new Church World Service (CWS) Mentoring Program. However, this activity has been postponed until further notice.

**Palm Beach County Library System-** Adam S. Davis, Director, System Services, Palm Beach County Library System, was present. All Palm Beach County Library locations will be closed to the public until further notice. The Palm Beach County Library is taking steps to support its customers as much as possible during the temporary closure. They are offering 'technology assistance' through one-on-one sessions with librarians via Zoom. Individuals should call 561-233-2600 to schedule an appointment. They are also offering homework help (online tutoring in math, science, social studies, and language arts). Live assistance will be offered daily from 12pm to 12am in English and Spanish. The library is also offering online resources regarding 'career development' (learning new skills, updating resumes, etc.). Lastly, the Palm Beach Library is offering free temporary e-cards to any child in Palm Beach County. The card will allow children/youth to access online resources and services. Individuals can sign up here: <http://www.pbclibrary.org/virtual-library>.

**Palm Beach County School District-** Javier Ortolaza, Specialist Guidance Services, Department of Multicultural Education, stated that students would receive schoolwork online/virtually. He mentioned that comcast is offering free 60 days of internet for families without internet in the home. The school will provide food to families. Breakfast and lunch will be provided to students at 35 sites. They will also be providing tablets so that students can study remotely. In case of any emergency situations, Javier stated he can be reached at 561-707-1100.

**Palm Beach State College (PBSC) -**Robin C. Johnson-Blake, MS, Director, Community Relations, from PBSC stated that students will receive remote instruction and online tutoring. Students can go online for all classes. Additional information can be found at: <https://www.palmbeachstate.edu/>

**Early Learning Coalition of PBC. (ELC-PBC)-** Mary stated that all offices are closed and staff members are working remotely. Families can access services online. ELC-PBC are hosting live provider Q&A webinars. They are also offering story-time and other Facebook live activities to extend learning opportunities to parents with children at home. ELC is coordinating with community partners to provide parents with information and assistance to help them select high-quality child-development services, including Voluntary Pre-kindergarten, School Readiness, and other vital early learning programs. More information can be found at the following two links: <https://www.elcpalmbeach.org/parent-coronavirus> and [www.elcpalmbeach.org](http://www.elcpalmbeach.org).

**Lutheran Services of Florida (LSF)-** Natacha Bazin, M.A., Child Safety, Health & Nutrition Program Manager, LSF Palm Beach Head Start/Early Head Start, stated they are offering services to children ages 6-weeks to 5 years of age. Their office is operating with a skeleton crew and staff members are reaching out to families via phone to assist them.

**CENSUS 2020-** On behalf of Ana Maria Diaz, Partnership Specialist CENSUS, Miriam shared information with the task force. The official launch of the 2020 Census is underway. When completing the census, individuals should include everyone living in their home on April 1, 2020. Complete and accurate counting of the local population is key to assuring that the diverse range of federal funding invested in local communities is appropriately apportioned. She stated the importance of educating the entire community on the importance of the completing the CENSUS (which can be completed online, through mail, or over the phone). The Census Bureau is required by law to turn in state population counts by December 31, 2020. Information/data can be found at [www.2020census.gov](http://www.2020census.gov). Ana Maria Diaz can be contacted at 678-938-9136.

**American Red Cross (ARC),** Jaime Cruz, Service to the Armed Forces & International Services Specialist, stated that all local ARC offices are closed. The ARC is still offering all available services to those that need them. Individuals with questions can call 786-714-6796.

**FL Highway Safety Motor Vehicle -** Ulises Pacheco, Program Consultant, stated that to minimize exposure to COVID-19, beginning Thursday, March 19 through Sunday, April 19 all FLHSMV offices will be temporarily closed to the public. For information on online services individuals can visit us at [www.FLHSMV.gov](http://www.FLHSMV.gov).

**Department of Labor (DOL)-** Ariel G Rivera Maldonado, Community Outreach and Resource Planning Specialist, U.S. Department of Labor / Wage and Hour Division spoke briefly regarding the services that they offer. The latest information from DOL regarding COVID-19 can be found here: <https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/osec/osec20200320>.

**Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition of Palm Beach County (HMHB)-** Belci Encinosa, LCSW | Director of Community Health Initiatives, HMHB continues to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on clients, staff, donors and community partners. Belci shared some modifications to their programs and services. Client intakes for prenatal care needs continue, however face-to-face appointments are on hold. HMHB are implementing telehealth services effective Monday, March 23rd to ensure all prenatal clients can be supported through Healthy Beginnings. All clients who are currently pregnant must continue with their prenatal care visits. OB offices around the county are fully operational. Early and consistent prenatal care is critical during this time. Basics4Babies Emergency Pantry for Infants will operate as usual (Monday through Thursday in all HMHB locations). While HMHB have a healthy inventory of diapers, formula, and baby food today, that will change as the needs of families throughout the community are elevated. Small Steps Great Parents workshops are on hold. Circle of Moms and Centering Pregnancy groups are in the process of going virtual. Caps & Cribs Teen Mom Mentoring has halted in person mentoring, however, virtual communication is active and uninterrupted. If anyone has questions, concerns or comments, they can visit [www.hmhbpbpc.org](http://www.hmhbpbpc.org).

**DCF-** Paige Patterson-Hughes, DCF Southeast Region Communications Director, was present at the meeting. She said that members of the press could reach her at 954-375-3354, 954-410-3931 or [paige.pattersonhughes@myflfamilies.com](mailto:paige.pattersonhughes@myflfamilies.com).

**RS Contracted providers:** CWS, Oscar Rivera, indicated CWS is operating with a skeleton crew in the office. Before coming into the office, all clients are encouraged to call in and set up an appointment beforehand. The contact person is Francisco Figueroa, Program Administrator CWS, and the phone number is 561-266-0624.

### **NEXT MEETING:**

**Next Meeting:**     **Friday, May 22, 2020**  
                          Time: 10:00 AM to 12PM  
                          Location: TBA

**Contact:**            [Miriam.Rosario@myflfamilies.com](mailto:Miriam.Rosario@myflfamilies.com) Phone: (561) 227-6722  
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