



**State of Florida
Department of Children and Families**

Ron DeSantis
Governor

Chad Poppell
Secretary

DATE: October 28, 2020
TO: Members of the Southwest Florida Refugee Task Force
FROM: Janet Blair, Refugee Services (RS)
SUBJECT: October 28th Meeting Minutes

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR:

Date: February 3rd, 2021
Time: 1:00-3:00pm
Location: Microsoft Teams

Contact: Janet Blair
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This task force has been active in the South West Florida area for many years. The participants are representatives of various government agencies, private not-for-profit organizations and mutual assistance associations. An average of 25 people attends 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 next meeting!

SWFL REFUGEE TASK FORCE MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was held via Microsoft Teams due to the pandemic. Janet Blair, David Draper and Ileana Bustelo represented Refugee Services, Dept. of Children & Families (DCF). Forty people were present at the meeting which began at 1:04pm.

Presentations

The first presentation was from Christine McKee from the ESS (Economic Self Sufficiency) program at DCF. She shared plans for a new business model in 2021 which will be focused on customer care coordination. This new model is being piloted in other regions and will be coming to the Suncoast Region in early 2021. In anticipation of full Care Coordination rollout, the State has launched a website where Florida Families can connect to Community Services: <https://www.myfloridamyfamily.com/> For questions concerning Care Coordination efforts within Suncoast Region or for agencies who would like to participate by accepting direct customer referrals, Christine McKee can be reached at Christine.McKee@myflfamilies.com or by phone at 239-771-0680.

The second presentation was on the Micro Enterprise Development Program coordinated by Lorene Gregory from Gulf Coast Jewish Family & Community Services. This unique program is currently focused on providing loans and technical assistance to refugee and asylee women and is open to clients in the entire Suncoast region. Loans range from \$300-\$10,000 and a total of 10 refugee owned businesses have already been launched with 7-8 other clients in the pipeline. Referrals to the program from SWFL are encouraged and a copy of the presentation is attached to this email. More information can be found at <https://gulfcoastjewishfamilyandcommunityservices.org/refugee-services/refugee-micro-enterprise-development/> and Lorene can be reached at Lorene.Gregory@gcjfcs.org

USCIS Update

Don Jarrell, Community Relations Officer, shared that there are several upcoming virtual information sessions in English and in Spanish being held in the next month. He also shared that there are no fee increases that have been approved at this time but to keep checking the USCIS website in case this changes with court determinations. He also shared the proposed rule for the changes to the affidavit of support and the extended flexibility for responses from USCIS to agency requests which will continue through this calendar year. Please contact Don at TampaDistrictCommunityRelations@uscis.dhs.gov with any questions.

Spanish Language Virtual Information Sessions
Wednesday, November 4 – 10:30am-12pm
Wednesday, November 25 – 10:30am-12pm

Virtual Information Sessions
Wednesdays, 10:30am-12pm
Thursdays, 6-8pm

Proposed Rule – Affidavit of Support

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/10/02/2020-21504/affidavit-of-support-on-behalf-of-immigrants>

USCIS Extends Flexibility for Responding to Agency Requests

<https://www.uscis.gov/news/alerts/uscis-extends-flexibility-for-responding-to-agency-requests-1>

Shelly Randall, Field Office Director of the Fort Myers USCIS Office shared that the office is now fully staffed and continues to provide same-day naturalization ceremonies for all who pass their citizenship test. The Fort Myers office is also doing virtual information sessions with open Q & A sessions. Shelly can be reached at shelly.d.randall@uscis.dhs.gov for more information.

Lutheran Services Florida (LSF) Update

All offices continue to be open and working a hybrid schedule with staff alternating work in the office and work remotely. There has been a decline in new clients arriving in SWFL due to the pandemic. And LSF is looking at new ways to do outreach to former clients and let them know that they can still access services. The relationship with the Social Security Administration has been much better and over 50 clients from the Sarasota area alone are now working after receiving their new social security cards. Additionally, the Sarasota LSF office is holding a virtual open house event on November 12th at 3:00pm. To register for the event go to <https://lsf.salsalabs.org/sarasotaopenhouse/index.html>

Refugee Services Updates:

David Draper encouraged all attendees to continue checking the DCF website for updated information at <https://www.myflfamilies.com/covid19/> He also shared that the White House has proposed a total of 15,000 new refugee arrivals for fiscal year 2021 but this declaration has not yet been signed. Approximately 250,000 asylees are also expected during this fiscal year. Florida expects to continue receiving both Cuban and Venezuelan asylees this year. Finally, he encouraged providers and community partners to work together to assist clients who may be struggling with housing costs and to link them with local resources as needed. Ileana Bustelo shared her appreciation for the ongoing work being done by both refugee services providers and community partners during this difficult year.

Additional Updates/Discussion

- Brian Granstra from Lee County Adult Education GED/ESOL shared that registration is now available at www.leeschools.net/ACE for the spring semester. Two-thirds of classes are being held virtually and open to anyone in the state of Florida. The cost for both in-person classes and virtual classes is \$30 per semester.
- Matthew Johnson is the new supervisor of the Suncoast Region's RAP program in ESS at DCF, replacing Denise Garbin. He can be reached at Matthew.Johnson@myflfamilies.com

NEXT MEETING: February 3rd 2021 at 1:00pm, on Microsoft Teams

CONTACTS: Janet.Blair@myffamilies.com or David.Draper@myffamilies.com