



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

Ron DeSantis
Governor

Chad Poppell
Secretary

DATE: November 15, 2019
TO: Members of the South West Florida Refugee Task Force
FROM: Janet Blair, Refugee Services (RS)
SUBJECT: November 6th Meeting Minutes

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR:

Date: Feb. 12, 2020
Time: 1:00-3:00pm
Location: Dept. of Health
Room 2063, 2200 Ringling
Blvd. Sarasota, FL

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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 twenty people 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 next meeting!

SWFL REFUGEE TASK FORCE MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was held at the Department of Children and Families in Fort Myers. Janet Blair, Community Liaison, represented the Dept. of Children & Families (DCF). Nineteen people were present and the meeting was called to order at 1:10.

PRESENTATIONS

- The first presentation was given by Don Jarrell of United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). He passed out Public Charge Fact Sheets and shared that there are now 8 new online forms at the USCIS website. Clients are urged to learn to navigate the site as the goal is for USCIS to go completely paperless in the near future. Shelly Randall, Field Office Director of the USCIS Fort Myers branch, shared that the office is now fully staffed. The Fort Myers office has been up and running for 3 years now and processing times are steadily declining. Shelly did stress that it is important for clients not to apply for citizenship prior to studying for the exam. Since applications are now taking less time to process, clients should be prepared to take the test prior to submitting their application.
- The second presentation was given by Denise Garbin from DCF Economic Self-Sufficiency (ESS). Denise is the Operations and Management Consultant (OMCI) and oversees the Refugee Assistance Program (RAP) Unit for the region. She went over new income guidelines that are effective as of October 1st of this year. She also announced that all ESS staff are now cross trained in administering RAP as of Oct. 1st and shared that as of May 1st there will be a change statewide that no clients will have expedited food assistance without an interview being conducted first.
- The final presentation was given by Ahmed Khan from Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR). There is now a Fort Myers CAIR office and all services are offered pro bono. Clients can be assisted with immigration documentation, school bullying issues, know your rights clinics and family law. More information can be found at <https://www.cairflorida.org/>

DCF, PROVIDER & COMMUNITY UPDATES

- Janet Blair presented a Power Point on working with Child Support Enforcement.
- Lutheran Services, Florida's SWFL Comprehensive Refugee Services program shared that they are launching a new mentor program. An event will be held next week to recruit youth and young adults for the program which serves those ages 15-24. This program will be available in Sarasota, Lee and Collier counties. The Sarasota office will be moving in February to another location.
- Collier County Health Department was represented by Sharon Paterson who shared that they are seeing an increase in Haitian arrivals. They have seen 283 individuals so far this

year in the Refugee Clinic.

- Nirupa Netram, Director of Foundation & Legal Operations Southwest Florida Community Foundation, announced that the next immigration learning community meeting will be held on Feb. 13th, 2020. This is a wonderful networking opportunity for those working with immigrants in the area. All meetings are held in Fort Myers and more information can be found at www.floridacommunity.com

NEXT MEETING: February 12, 2020, 1:00-3:00pm at Dept of Health in Sarasota

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