



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

Rick Scott
Governor

Mike Carroll
Secretary

DATE: June 11, 2018
TO: Members of the South West Florida Refugee Task Force
FROM: Janet Blair, Refugee Services (RS)
SUBJECT: May 9th Meeting Minutes

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR:

Date: August 8th 2018
Time: 1:00-3:00pm
Location: Florida Dept. of Health
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 fifteen 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 at the United States Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS) office located at 4220 Executive Circle Suite in Fort Myers, FL. Janet Blair, Community Liaison represented the Florida Dept. of Children & Families (DCF). Twenty-four people were present and the meeting was called to order at 1:15.

PRESENTATIONS

- The first presentation was given by Max Maromontel from the Lee County Refugee Center Inc. This agency which is located in Fort Myers, focuses on assisting the Haitian population which Max says is estimated at 300,000 in SWFL alone. The Center provides both documented and undocumented Haitians with basic needs, legal assistance, temporary shelter, referrals and financial assistance. The Center is funded locally by faith communities and is looking forward to working closely with the Lutheran Services refugee program. More detailed information about this new organization can be found at each of the following link: <http://leecountyrefugee.com/>
- The second presentation was given by Shelly Randall of USCIS. Shelly said that the Fort Myers Service Center was almost completely staffed now and doing four citizenship ceremonies each week at this location. Between 400-500 people are being naturalized monthly at this branch and the backlog is decreasing. Saturday interviews are now available and there is a real emphasis on paperless filing. USCIS as a whole is in a reorganization period due to new executive orders and so some services have longer wait time than others. Info pass appointments are now being limited and there is a pilot project in Jacksonville that eliminates them entirely. After the meeting, a tour of the USCIS facility was offered to all task force members.

PROVIDER & COMMUNITY UPDATES

- The SWFL Task Force's World Refugee Day event planning is underway and has gathered a great deal of community support. The event will be held on Friday, June 15th from noon to 2:30pm in Selby Auditorium on the University of South Florida Sarasota campus.
- Welcoming Week: Jacque Williams from the LSF Fort Myers office announced that the Welcoming Week event will be held on Sept. 17th and will include a luncheon with locally elected officials including the Mayor of Fort Myers. More details will follow.
- Janet shared that Refugee Services data for October 1, 2017 to April 30, 2018 showed a total of 87 new arrivals to Collier County, 95 arrives to Lee County and 48 arrivals to Sarasota/Manatee Counties.

- Denise Garbin from the DCF ACCESS program shared that they now only see 1-2 applications per day from newly arriving refugees/entrants due to the low number of arrivals.
- LSF continues to have a large client base at all three office locations due to the large number of arrivals in previous years. The key outreach tool being utilized is Textedly which allows LSF to stay connected to clients through texts rather than solely emails or phone calls. This communication has assisted in outreach and client retention.

NEXT MEETING: August 8th 2018 from 1:00-3:00pm in Sarasota

Contacts Janet.Blair@myffamilies.com or David.Draper@myffamilies.com