



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

**Rick Scott**  
Governor

**Mike Carroll**  
Secretary

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**DATE:** August 22, 2018  
**TO:** Members of the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force  
**FROM:** Janet Blair, Refugee Services (RS)  
**SUBJECT:** August 21st Meeting Minutes

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

**Date:** Tuesday, December 11, 2018  
**Time:** 1:30 P.M. – 3:30 P.M.  
**Location:** 9393 North Florida Ave  
Tampa, FL  
**Contact:** Janet Blair  
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This task force has been active in the Tampa area for many years. The participants are representatives of various government agencies, private not-for-profit organizations and mutual assistance associations. An average of 50 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!*

## TAMPA BAY AREA REFUGEE TASK FORCE MINUTES

***Mission Statement: Helping Refugees to settle, integrate and thrive through support, education and community.***

The meeting was held at Pinellas Technical College located at 9393 North Florida Ave, Tampa, FL. Janet Blair represented the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Refugee Service Program. A total of 57 were present and the meeting was called to order at 1:45pm.

### Presentations:

- An extended Mental Health Minute was presented by Florence Ackey on behalf of the mental health subcommittee. The focus of this presentation was on stress management and resilience. This was an attempt to support the providers and community members during this difficult time of low arrivals, budget cuts and staff layoffs.
- Our first presentation was from two University of South Florida (USF), College of Public Health graduate students regarding their ongoing research on bullying of refugee children & youth. Very little has been written in academic journals on this issue. The students have conducted interviews with refugee services providers and will soon be moving on to interviewing refugee families impacted by bullying in this ongoing research project.
- The second presentation was a recap of World Refugee Day with special recognition being given to the planning committee and to Doug Haskitt and Dr. Campbell from Pinellas Technical College. This year's event was a tremendous success with over 250 in attendance and four tuition scholarships being offered to refugee students to attend technical college this year.
- The third presentation was provided by Monica Rodriguez Lucas on the nonprofit loan program, Capital Good Fund. This program provides lower interest loans to immigrants and refugees for personal emergencies, immigration fees and car purchases in an attempt to help them avoid the payday loan agencies like Amcott and to assist them with building their credit. These loans are also accompanied by financial coaching and counseling. More information on this program can be found at <https://capitalgoodfund.org/en/>
- After the presentations, there was some discussion around the letters that some Burmese refugees have received in other states and in Jacksonville FL requesting that they come into the USCIS (United States Citizenship & Immigration Services) office for interviews regarding their background screenings and personal data given prior to their resettlement. It was shared by Gulf Coast Jewish Family & Community Services that some clients who relocated to Tampa Bay were sent these letters and had to travel at their own expense back to the USCIS office near their original resettlement location. Otherwise, we have not had any local cases of these letters being distributed.

## **Refugee Services Update**

- Janet reported that during Fiscal Year 2018 through July 31<sup>st</sup>, there have been 466 new arrivals in Hillsborough County and 147 arrivals in Pinellas County. Of these 613 arrivals, 384 were Cuban, 51 were Congolese and 34 were Ethiopian/Eritrean. Also included in these numbers were 31 asylees from Egypt and 24 from Venezuela. Last fiscal year there were a total of 3,124 arrivals in Tampa Bay.
- Janet also shared that as a result of the Faith Community Summit held earlier this year, an Interfaith Thanksgiving event for refugees is being planned by Christian, Muslim and Jewish organizations for this November. The event will be held on Sunday, November 18<sup>th</sup> at the USF Alumni Center in Tampa. In addition, faith communities continue to provide support and services for refugee families by hosting back to school events, donating school supplies and clothing to children & youth starting school, holding sewing classes on both sides of the bay for refugee women and offering emergency cash assistance and household donations as needed. We are fortunate to have this strong community support at this time.

## **Committee & General Updates**

- The Mental Health Committee report was given by Stacy Kratz. This committee has launched an initiative to fund a loan at Project Prosper in the amount of \$1,500 to be given to a refugee client. Project Prosper is a local nonprofit that has worked closely with the task force for ten years and offered a total of 76 small loans in Tampa Bay with 44 of these going to refugees. The goal is to have this funded loan presented at the Project Prosper annual breakfast in October. These funds are from individual members of the task force who choose to be involved. More information on Project Prosper can be found at <http://www.projectprosper.org/en/>
- The Education Committee report was shared by Lesleigh Lopez. She is working on a plan to address the issue of bullying in Hillsborough County Schools through a series of presentations to school principals and school resource officers. She is also working on a transportation issue where buses were full and not transporting children in need.
- The Youth Pathways program at Gulf Coast Jewish Family & Community Services (GCJFCS) reported a reduction of funding that will greatly impact their program.
- Welcoming Week event updates were given on the event to be held in Tampa on Saturday, September 22<sup>nd</sup> led by USF affiliated organizations and the donation drive being held for the month of September lead by Pinellas County Libraries.
- GCJFCS also shared that their National Partnership for Community Training in partnership with the National Council for Behavioral Health, will provide training to 15 refugee leaders from across the country in early September here in Clearwater. These refugee leaders will receive training on how to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental health problems, increase mental health literacy and decrease stigma, build a trauma-informed approach to personal and professional situations, identify community assets, build a network of mental health supports, and maintain a practice of self-care. All who complete the program will receive their Mental Health First Aid instructor certification.

- The CARIBE Adult Education program shared that they are closing the MacDill class site due to budget cuts and shortening Saturday classes from 5 instructional hours to 4 hours weekly. They also announced that they have nominated a USF graduate student who works with the Congolese Saturday class as the adult education volunteer of the year. Finally, CARIBE and Youth Pathways shared a joint success story of a Congolese 18-year-old student who just graduated and is a wonderful role model for the refugee community.
- Finally, a celebration was held for a case manager, Martha Kamagwera, who won a community award from the Juvenile Welfare Board for her work with Congolese refugee families resettled in St. Petersburg. Martha works for the Florida Center for Survivors of Torture and was recognized at a community wide luncheon for her outstanding service to children & families in Pinellas County.

### **Upcoming TF Meeting:**

December 11<sup>th</sup> at Department of Children & Families, 9393 N Florida Ave, Tampa.  
End of year luncheon at 1:00pm and meeting from 1:30-3:30pm.