



State of Florida
Department of Children and Families

Rick Scott
Governor

Mike Carrol
Secretary

MEMORANDUM

DATE: September 13, 2017
TO: Members of the Tallahassee Refugee Task Force
FROM: Theresa Leslie, Refugee Services (RS)
SUBJECT: September 12, 2017 Meeting Minutes

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR:

Date: December 12, 2017 postponed to Jan 9, 2018
Note: World Refugee Day Event substitutes for June Task Force meeting

Time: 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM
Location: International Rescue Committee Office
124 Marriott Dr, Suite 105
Tallahassee, Florida 32301

Contact: Theresa Leslie
Office: (850) 778-4065
Cell: (850) 445-4040
E-Mail: Theresa.Leslie@myflfamilies.com

This task force has been active in the Tallahassee 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!

2383 Phillips Rd. Tallahassee, FL 32308

TALLAHASSEE AREA REFUGEE TASK FORCE MEETING

INTRODUCTION

The meeting was held at the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the local Comprehensive Refugee Services provider for Department of Children and Families (DCF) in Leon County at 124 Marriott Drive, Tallahassee, Florida 32301. Theresa Leslie, Community Liaison represented (DCF), Refugee Services (RS) Program. Rebecca Lockenbach, Refugee Services, Contract Manager was also present at this meeting. The meeting was called to order and participants introduced themselves and the agency they represented while reporting new policies, programs and updates.

Una Bilic, Site Manager with International Rescue Committee reported that there has been a reduction in the number of refugees moving into Leon County. Although there have been a few arrivals since February 2017, IRC is expecting an increase in arrivals at the beginning of Federal Fiscal Year, October 1, 2017.

- Ms. Bilic gave an overview about the successes and challenges of resettling refugee families while meeting all the mandatory but very worthwhile requirements such as: medical screening including school immunizations and lab/blood work, ACCESS enrollment for public benefits including Medicaid, Social Security enrollment for each refugee, and school enrollment for the children and ESOL enrollment for the adults.
- Not all initial processes are mandatory but others are very helpful, such as: obtaining bus passes, Division of Motor Vehicles official picture identification, basic orientation to life in the U.S. and shortly after arriving adult refugees participate in several workshops and orientations related to employment. Ms. Bilic often reviews these initial activities as it is important for the community partners present to be aware of what happens within the first few weeks of the client's arrival.
- IRC's Comprehensive Refugee Services contract with the Department of Children and Families has been the main focus of their program. Since the last Task Force meeting the program staff continues to address the English and school tutoring needs of the children and adults. They have also focused on recruitment of employers that offer on-the-job training, career laddering, and mentorship/internship, and further community outreach.

NEXT FOR EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

The RS Community Liaison, Ms. Leslie reported that these past months have allowed the provider to increase their efforts to establish stronger and more promising job opportunities for refugees. This allows refugees to gain a stronger sense of economic self-sufficiency within their community. All refugee employment and adult education service providers around the state are engaged in a similar effort.

IRC's Employment Specialist has strengthened ties to Florida State University (FSU), Food Service Program, Sydeco. This company manages several restaurants and dining facilities on campus and is willing to give priority hiring to local refugees. This is convenient as it is on a bus

route from their apartments and has varied shifts and hours. The same arrangement is being sought with Florida Agriculture and Mechanical University (FAMU).

Refugees have been attending their English classes in the morning and early afternoon at ACE then reporting for work at FSU in late afternoon for the evening shift.

Marpan, the local recycling plant located 6020 Woodville Hwy, Tallahassee, FL 32305 has hired several refugees on full-time hours. Refugee employees are frequently offered overtime hours to work if they wish. It is helpful that they are open 6 days a week, Monday-Saturday which gives flexibility to their spouses to work also. One refugee recently bought a used car and picks up other refugees and drives them to and from work.

The Community Liaison and provider staff continually advocate for other sources of employment. This is not always successful as even janitorial jobs at the hospital needs their staff to at least understand English. The hospital is very pleased with 2 of their refugee staff that work in the file room but came to the United States speaking some English.

COLLEGE STUDENTS AS VOLUNTEER TUTORS

Theresa Leslie provided an update from the FSU group called Migrant and Refugee Education Alliance. This group is led by Olivia McDonnell, Presidential Scholar who works with other students to organize efforts to tutor approximately 60 refugee students 3 days a week at school. This is a continuation of the group's efforts from the last school year.

This group of fifty plus tutor-volunteers have been assigned a refugee student and have selected time slots that do not interfere with their college classes. Since many of the student tutors were familiar with the Arabic language they were assigned to the Syrian students while gradually taking on the Congolese students. Student tutors are committed to tutoring 3 days a week for one class period. This effort has been coordinated with the Althea Valle, Leon County School, ESOL Coordinator.

Two other faith based groups of volunteers have also been tutoring Congolese and Syrian students since the beginning of 2017. Just about all of the students have been assigned their own tutor.

It is important to recognize that some of the tutors also participate in homework help at the students' home or at their faith based agency.

Volunteer tutors will also be recruited from FAMU as well.

Kelly Rameriz, a Service Scholar from FSU was introduced. She explained how she used her years of experience tutoring students from several different countries into working directly with teachers in Leon County. She reported how she worked with teachers, ESOL coordinators, and reading instructors from two schools that have are new to teaching refugees with no English language skills.

This was an important undertaking but make a huge difference in the teacher's confidence to work with the Congolese students.

SOCIAL EXPERIENCES

As reported by representatives from City Church and the Mormon Church, IRC staff and other volunteers have taken refugee youngsters to the circus, local parks, church functions, and picnics. Student and faith-based volunteers plan for as many social activities as possible and include their parents as well.

PROGRAM AND RESOURCE UPDATES

Adult Education: One of the Adult and Community Education ESOL Instructors invited anyone from the Task Force who would like to sit in an ESOL class to call Elizabeth Daniels, 850-717-2020, 24 hours in advance. She expressed the school's commitment to teaching English to the refugees while also making them feel welcome in their new community.

Department of Health: Refugee Health reported how they keep aware of all federal, state, and local policies and updates. As medical assessments for all newly arriving refugees are required, they are still assisting local public health units even while there has been a reduction in these appointments.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, December 12, 2017
10:00 to Noon
International Rescue Committee
124 Marriott Dr, Suite 105
Tallahassee, FL 32301

Contact: Theresa.Leslie@myflfamilies.com Phone: (850) 778-4065
Taddese.Fessehaye@myflfamilies.com Phone: (407) 317-7335