



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

Ron DeSantis
Governor

Chad Poppell
Secretary

DATE: May 6, 2019
TO: Members of the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force
FROM: Janet Blair, Refugee Services (RS)
SUBJECT: **April 30th**, 2019 Meeting Minutes

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR:

Date: August 27th, 2019
Time: 1:30 P.M. – 3:30 P.M.
Location: Main Auditorium, 9393 North
Florida Ave, Tampa, FL
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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, academic institutions and faith community representatives. An average of 55 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 and needs, facilitate strong communication among refugee services and community providers, get informed about upcoming community events, 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 the Department of Children and Families located at 9393 North Florida Ave, Tampa, FL. Janet Blair represented the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Refugee Service Program. A total of 67 were present and the meeting was called to order at 1:40pm.

Presentations:

- The first presentation was from Bank On Suncoast, a United Way program which connects the unbanked and the underbanked with safe and affordable banking. This statewide coalition works with banks to ensure that individuals can have low cost checking accounts with no overdraft fees. They also provide training on banking 101 and assist clients with alternatives to payday loan institutions by helping them set up savings accounts. More information on this program can be found at: <https://unitedwaysuncoast.org/what-we-do/income/bank-on-suncoast/>
- The second presentation was on SLIFE (Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education). Andrea DeCapua, Ed.D. who is internationally known for her work in this area, has recently moved to Tampa Bay and has offered to work with our task force and local school districts to ensure better outcomes for SLIFE children & youth. Andrea has worked nationally and internationally with schools, teachers and students to differentiate the needs of students with limited literacy in ESOL from literate students. She says that both youth and adults who are preliterate need education that is immediately useful, grounded in observation and more orally based. Being preliterate, they process & classify information differently and teachers need to be aware of this since school culture at all levels is based on the presumption of literacy. Andrea's background, books and body of work can be found at <http://www.andreadecapua.com/>
- A third presentation was given by Sadiki Bertin on the new nonprofit ECBO entitled YEDP (Youth Education Development Program) that has been established as a 501c3 in Tampa. YEDP works with primarily Congolese youth but is open to all refugee children and teens. They have a soccer program , provide advocacy in the school system, meet new arrivals at the airport, provide interpretation and transportation through volunteers and hope to open a day care center in the near future.
- The final presentation was on Tampa Women Stars, Inc. an ECBO created by and for Arabic speaking women. This all-volunteer run program started in 2018 with the goal of teaching English to homebound caregivers who came as refugees. Their first class had 15 students. Lectures were taped and posted on YouTube by highly educated volunteers, then student sent in their photographed homework and recorded voices speaking English via WhatsApp. The program now has 5 volunteer teachers and 95 students. The goal is to equip women with basic English skills that are practical for going to the store or making a doctor appointment. The program has also added citizenship classes and driver's training classes. They are funded entirely by donations and also help students financially as needed. This program's creative use of technology is impressive, and they will be recognized at this year's World Refugee Day event for all they have accomplished. More information and their online store with all proceeds going to help the program, can be found at <http://www.tampawomenstars.com/>

- The Mental Health Minute was presented by Stacy Kratz, PhD, on behalf of the mental health subcommittee. This presentation focused on the experience of grief, noting that grief can be experienced with any loss or major transition and is not limited to only grieving those who are deceased. The refugee clients we serve have faced multiple losses of people, place and culture and often have not had the chance to grieve. Once resettled, they may need opportunities to express their grief in culturally appropriate ways.

Refugee Services Update

- Janet gave handouts and information on several local organizations that may help our clients including the Red Cross which can help refugees find missing family members through their location program.
- Janet briefly reviewed the Refugee Services Performance Report for 2018, highlighting the increase in Venezuelan asylees and sharing the work the Outreach Committee has done to engage this community.
- Special recognition was given to Ghadir Kassab, Director of Radiant Hands who has been an outstanding member of the task force this past year, volunteering for 3 committees and speaking at two community events. Additionally, Ghadir has spearheaded the launch of Radiant Kitchens, a licensed catering business run by refugee women cooking middle eastern food.

General Updates

- DCF ACCESS program shared that several local ESS offices/lobbies will be closing in this region. The Pasco County office will close on July 26, 2019 and the St Petersburg Office at Mirror Lake will close on August 23, 2019.
- The CARIBE Adult Education program in Hillsborough has relocated their offices and is now housed within Erwin Technical School in order to save costs.
- PREP Adult Education Program in Pinellas County is once again offering tuition scholarships for refugee students wishing to attend vocational training. Applications are now being accepted for two scholarships, which will be given out at World Refugee Day.
- A planning meeting for World Refugee Day 2019 will be held on May 1st at Pinellas Technical College in St. Petersburg. This year's event will be held June 14th, 2019 and will include cultural dance, stories of refugee success, food and informational booths. There will not be a citizenship ceremony this year due to a transition of leadership at the local USCIS field office.
- The health department's refugee clinic reminded providers that there are only 90 days now to begin and complete the entire health assessment. If this timeframe is not adhered to, there is no way to provide vaccines for clients.

Upcoming TF Meetings for 2019: April 30th/ August 27th/ December 10th

All meetings in 2019 will be held from 1:30-3:30pm in the Main Auditorium at the Department of Children & Families located at 9393 N Florida Ave in Tampa.