



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

Ron DeSantis
Governor

Chad Poppell
Secretary

DATE: September 4, 2019
TO: Members of the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force
FROM: Janet Blair, Refugee Services (RS)
SUBJECT: **August 27th**, 2019 Meeting Minutes

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR:

Date: December 10, 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 56 were present and the meeting was called to order at 1:35pm.

- DCF Suncoast's Regional Managing Director, Walter Sachs, opened the meeting with a welcome. Walter moved from Tallahassee to the Suncoast region 3 months ago.
- The Mental Health Minute was offered by Florence Ackey who co-chairs the task force mental health committee. This quarterly presentation is brief educational opportunity for task force members to learn about matters related to the mental health of their clients and themselves. This installment focused on self-care and burnout for providers when working with refugees who have suffered extensive trauma.

Presentations:

- The first presentation was from Lourdes Mesias, statewide director of refugee services for Lutheran Services, Florida (LSF). Lourdes gave an overview of the new Comprehensive Refugee Services model that will be implemented in Tampa Bay on October 1st of this year. Lourdes gave a brief overview of each of the services to be offered by LSF in the new fiscal year: employment, employability related immigration services, youth, mentoring, childcare and tiered case management. She also explained that some services, such as adult education, will be provided via subcontracts. Lourdes also outlined the new assessment that will be given to all new arrivals and the three tiers of case management that will be provided in lieu of the Integration Assistance program which will no longer be funded. Additionally, Lourdes shared demographic information on LSF arrivals for the past 5 years. A total of 61% of arrivals have been Cuban and 5% have been Congolese.
- The second presentation given by Ghadir Kassab who manages the programs offered by our community partner, Radiant Hands. This program served 471 refugees last year and offers educational programs for youth as well as innovative employment programs for adults. The Radiant Kitchens program started with a curriculum for refugee women to learn about catering and has grown into a small business with an app that can be downloaded and online ordering. More information on Radiant Hands can be found at <https://www.radianthands.org/> and information about Radiant Kitchens can be found at <https://www.radianthands.org/radiant-kitchens>
- The final presentation was offered by University of South Florida graduate student, Emily Holbrook, who completed her Anthropology thesis by working with refugee students in the local adult education program around issues of food access and nutrition. In partnership with CARIBE staff, Emily has designed curricula for refugee students to learn about utilizing benefits while learning ESOL. Emily has been a devoted student volunteer at CARIBE and was recognized last year with a statewide award.

Refugee Services Update

- Janet gave an update on arrivals for the first three quarters of the current fiscal year. Tampa Bay has

had a total of 1,395 arrivals as of June 30th, 2019. 86% of arrivals are Cuban.

- Doug Haskitt, director of the PREP adult education program in Pinellas County was recognized for his leadership of another successful World Refugee Day event as well as his ongoing work for the past nine years as an outstanding member of the task force. Doug will be retiring at the end of September after 32 years of service to Pinellas County Schools.

General Updates

- Libby Shannon of the Presbytery of Tampa Bay shared that the Presbytery has allocated another \$25,000 grant for emergency housing and utility funds for refugee families. Libby is also in a newly created position by the Presbytery which will focus on linking faith communities with community needs including refugee programs and services.
- Don Jarrell from USCIS handed out information on the new public charge policy.
- Welcoming Week Events: The Largo Library shared about the upcoming donation drive being held in Pinellas County for refugee families. Gulf Coast Jewish Family & Community Services shared a flyer about a dialogue being held on Sept. 19th in honor of National Welcoming Week.
- Sally Campbell-Evans shared that the Interfaith Committee has the second annual “Feels Like Home” Refugee Thanksgiving dinner planned for November 17th at the USF Alumni Center.
- DCF ACCESS program staff shared that for all Match Grant applications, providers should check the box that indicates they are applying for RAP Cash and then type in the comments that it is a Match Grant case. Also, all identity/immigration documents should be forwarded to SCR.Cash.Issues@myFLfamilies.com to ensure that the applications are correctly assigned to a worker trained to process RAP, which helps the customers get their benefits more quickly. Also, if the resettlement organization puts in the comments that they are working with the customer and includes the alien number on the application, we can accept that as collateral contact for identity to approve expedited food assistance.
- 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. Also, it is important for refugees to come to the health department prior to visiting primary care physicians.
- Coptic Orthodox Charities shared that they had a successful back to school event for refugee children and their families. Over 300 attended the event and all refugee youth were given backpacks and school supplies.
- The United Nations Tampa Bay Chapter and Gulf Coast Jewish Family & Community Services is sponsoring the second annual Picture My Life photography project for refugee youth and their photos will be on display and for sale at two upcoming art venues in September and October. Details will be emailed to task force members.

Upcoming TF Meeting: December 10th

This meeting will also include an end of the year celebration at 12:30pm followed by the meeting at 1:30pm. We will meet in the Main Auditorium at the Department of Children & Families located at 9393 N Florida Ave in Tampa.