



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

**Ron DeSantis**  
Governor

**Chad Poppell**  
Secretary

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**DATE:** February 26, 2019  
**TO:** Members of the South West Florida Refugee Task Force  
**FROM:** Janet Blair, Refugee Services (RS)  
**SUBJECT:** February 13<sup>th</sup> Meeting Minutes

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

**Date:** April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2019  
**Time:** 1:00-3:00pm  
**Location:** Dept. of Children & Families  
2295 Victoria Ave, Room 165  
Fort Myers, FL

**Contact:** Janet Blair  
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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 Florida Department of Health located at 2200 Ringling Blvd in Sarasota. Janet Blair, Community Liaison, represented the Florida Dept. of Children & Families (DCF). Thirteen people were present and the meeting was called to order at 1:10.

### PRESENTATIONS

- The first presentation was given by Michelle Snyder from CareerSource Suncoast, which has offices in both Bradenton and Sarasota counties. In addition to their traditional offerings, CareerSource now also has a focus on soft skills and has free classes on career development, branding and 7 Habits for highly effective people. Key growth sectors in the job market include construction, IT, hospitality, electrical work and health care. Information on upcoming job fairs can be found at [www.careersourcesuncoast.com/events](http://www.careersourcesuncoast.com/events)
- The second presentation was given by Grace Jean-Pierre from Centerstone Child Trauma Services. Along with mental health services for survivors of childhood trauma in Manatee, Sarasota and DeSoto counties, this program also offers training on Youth Mental Health First Aide and Trauma Informed Care. Both trainings are free of charge due to grant funding and can be tailored to each agency such as law enforcement or education or social services. For childhood trauma counseling, there is therapy offered in Spanish and the counselors are also willing to work with interpreters. More information on this program can be found at <https://centerstone.org/my-centerstone/>
- The final presentation was given by Elaine McArthur from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Elaine gave a brief overview of the employment rights of immigrants and what is classified as discriminatory action based on national origin. Elaine explained that although the online filing is only available in English, the EEOC has 150 languages available by telephone and can assist someone in filing. Elaine covers the entire state of Florida and is available for trainings at no charge. More information on the EEOC can be found at [www.eeoc.gov](http://www.eeoc.gov)

### REFUGEE SERVICES UPDATE

- Janet shared a brief overview from the Refugee Services Performance Review FFY2018, highlighting the information most relevant to SWFL.

### PROVIDER & COMMUNITY UPDATES

- There was some discussion regarding the SWFL Task Force's World Refugee Day event for this year. Last year's organizers cannot take on such a large scale event again and are

considering something on a small scale. A committee meeting will be held in late Feb. or early March.

- Shelly Randall from USCIS shared that more and more filings are available online and that starting March 4, 2019 info pass appointments will be geared to only what is necessary and most information will be found online. Shelly also noted that asylum applicants can check their status online and there are new online calculators to help clients see all fees required.
- The Lutheran Services, Inc. (LSF) Sarasota office manager, Ivis Triana, shared that LSF is seeing a lengthy wait for Employment Authorization Documents (EAD's) that is causing hardships on families due to the inability to work. She also shared that their current clients are almost 100% Cubans who are being given only one year paroles. An additional population in this area is Venezuelans who are moving to Manatee County/Bradenton. There are concerns about how to reach this population since the CareerSource and DCF do not refer Manatee clients since there is no physical office in that county. At this point, LSF Sarasota has over 215 active clients and the SWFL Comprehensive Refugee Services program has over 900 active clients as a whole.
- Elida Mujic, the Client Relations Coordinator for DCF in this area, shared that there are several upcoming office closures that will impact clients. The North Port, Naples and LaBelle DCF offices are all being closed this year. Providers and clients will need to utilize community partners for any in-person assistance. These updated community partners can be found at [www.myflorida.com/accessflorida](http://www.myflorida.com/accessflorida) Users will need to go to the box at the bottom right corner labeled "Find Us", and then to a bullet that says "Search For A Partner Near You" which they will click on. Then they will see community partners listed by county or zip code. Some community partners will only serve their clients, so it is important to find one that is open to the general public.

**NEXT MEETING: April 17<sup>th</sup> from 1:00-3:00pm in Fort Myers**

**CONTACTS: [Janet.Blair@myflfamilies.com](mailto:Janet.Blair@myflfamilies.com) or [David.Draper@myflfamilies.com](mailto:David.Draper@myflfamilies.com)**