



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

Rick Scott
Governor

Mike Carrol
Secretary

MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 19, 2019

TO: Members of the Tallahassee Refugee Task Force

FROM: Theresa Leslie, Refugee Services (RS)

SUBJECT: Task Force Meeting Minutes for March 12, 2019

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR:

Date: June 11, 2019
Time: 10:00 AM to 11:30 PM
Location: Department of Children and Families
1317 Winewood Blvd, Bldg 3,
Tallahassee, Florida 32399
Contact: Theresa Leslie
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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 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, 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.

TALLAHASSEE AREA REFUGEE TASK FORCE MEETING**INTRODUCTION**

The meeting was held at the Department of Children and Families Conference Room, Bldg 3 site and Theresa Leslie, Community Liaison represented (DCF), Refugee Services (RS) Program. The meeting was called to order and participants introduced themselves and the agency they represent.

PRESENTATION

Patti Grogan, The Refugee Services Program Director made the first presentation to give the participants a historical perspective to the growth and status of the program during the past 15-20 years. This perspective was compared to the political events of the previous years to what is currently occurring during 2019. As services for refugees have only begun to take effect during the past 5 years in Leon County most participants did not have a frame of reference from previous years.

She explained that the other refugee services programs in Florida have experienced a huge decrease in the numbers of new clients arriving in their counties. Ms. Grogan did confirm that many of the challenges and important issues facing refugees in Tallahassee are also being experienced around Florida especially those with Congolese refugees.

Ms. Grogan stressed the importance of offering as many options as possible to learn English for the clients. Do not just rely on the local Adult Education Program to offer ESOL classes but develop options that are offered in the evenings and on the week-end. Participants were reminded that variety is a must with refugees so keep brainstorming all options. English again is the key to better jobs, career laddering, adult education technical classes and even promotions. Ms. Grogan also shared ideas from around the state for ESOL opportunities like faith-based agencies offering space and instructors.

Update on the work of the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the Comprehensive Refugee Services provider in the NW Region, Leon County.

- Ms. Bilic reported that IRC is on track to welcome 150 new arrivals for the coming fiscal year, October 1, 2018 to September 30, 2019. The provider anticipates using all of their 80 Match Grant slots
- Ms. Bilic introduced Chase Beasley, as the new AmeriCorps Vista employee who has committed to work for the next two years in developing educational supports and other experiences for the refugee youth. Ms. Beasley is also getting his Masters degree in History taking on-line and evening classes. He recently started to work with IRC and has already met many of the teachers and Administrative Staff working with all the ESOL appointed teachers.
- The educational system is feeling the stress with so many refugees in a few schools while working with those who have never attended school before while in refugee camps.
- As IRC reminds the participants that while addressing the important need of learning English in the schools, the students are struggling with reading and writing skills. Mr Beasley will focus his efforts on the tutoring needs of the children during both their R&P and Case Management involvement. The students are eager to go to school, but the older students often struggle at first with their social involvement.
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- The provider reported that staff continues to focus on recruitment of employers that offer on-the-job training, career laddering, and mentorship/internship, and further community outreach. This is an ongoing effort. Several adults lost their job at the meat manufacturing plant in Cairo, Georgia and did not realize how hard it would be to find other employment. It was a good example to the clients to see those who spoke some English were the first to get jobs.

Lisa Urban, Leon County Schools main ESOL coordinator who guides and support the coordinators at each of the schools reported the on-going comments and challenges she hears from mainly Bond and Nims schools. She is very excited about the work that Mr. Beasley will be doing to support the teachers. The good news is that Bond and Nims are the only two schools in Leon County that will be having full time summer school. They are receiving Century 21 Grants for this purpose. Mr. Beasley will do an independent effort to provide tutoring for high school students in need of tutoring.

- Ms. Urban reports she makes frequent visits to the schools to check on the students who are learning English and keeps the provider informed about the

progress and critical challenges that need to be stressed. Ms. Urban seemed very enthused about her new position and is a welcome addition to the Task Force.

It was fortunate that Ms. Urban was able to meet the two FSU coordinators of the Migrant and Refugee Education Alliance (MREA), Liv McConnel and Samantha Kunin.

Staff from the local Red Cross made a presentation about an initiative they are conducting on Saturday, May 4. One hundred and fifty volunteers were recruited to initiate the "Sound the Alarm" initiative. They are going around town to check on fire alarms in residences. They are also offering to install up to 3 alarms per house with lithium batteries that last for 3 years. This is good information for case managers and volunteers who visit the families. Special efforts will be made to cover the complexes and homes of refugees.

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AND PRACTICE

- It was mentioned that the dilemma for the adult clients to continue their practice and learning of English after they begin working full or part times is an on-going issue in this community as well as others around the state. It was reported how other regions have initiated Saturday and evening ESOL classes that are conveniently located close to where clients live. This has proven successful for the clients and given providers another opportunity to reach more clients.
- At Holton Apartments, where the majority of refugees live, there are no community rooms available. Participants committed to offer their ideas for alternative locations as they come up. The Literacy Volunteers discussed their efforts to offer evening classes for ESOL and GED prep at the Perry Library close to Holton Apt. To date these classes are well attended by refugees due to close location.

EMPLOYMENT ACTIVITIES

- 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 will allow refugees to gain a confident 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 continued strengthening ties to Florida State University (FSU), Food Service Program, Sydexo. 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 has been sought with Florida Agriculture and Mechanical University (FAMU). The downfall of this employment site is that summer hours are greatly reduced.
- FAMU has offered refugees a few jobs in their Maintenance Department. It is hoped these partnerships for employment are successful and expand.
- With many refugees receiving tax return check recently many families bought used cars. It is hoped that these families have planned on their insurance premiums and car repairs in their monthly budgets. It was also reported that a former refugee from Egypt owns a local used car business and has been supportive in helping other refugees purchase reliable cars.
- The task force group was reminded by the Community Liaison that IRC provider staff, community partners, and task force members need to continually advocate for other sources of employment during their on-going community activities.

FAITH BASED GROUP

- St John's Episcopal Church had four of members of their "Due Justice" advocacy group asking how they can best support the refugees. They asked many questions and follow-up meetings need to take place to organize their efforts.
- Two other faith-based groups of volunteers have also been tutoring Congolese and Syrian students since the beginning of 2017. Most 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 one of the faith-based agencies. Volunteer tutors will also be recruited from FAMU as well.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, June 11, 2019
10:00 to 11:30 AM
Department of Children and Families
1317 Winewood Blvd, Bldg 3, Rm 202
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