



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

Ron DeSantis
Governor

Chad Poppell
Secretary

MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 23, 2020
TO: Members of the Broward Refugee Task Force
FROM: Miriam Rosario (RS)
SUBJECT: March 19, 2020 Meeting Minutes

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR:

Date: May 20, 2020
Time: 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM
Location: TBA
Contact: Miriam Rosario
Office: (561) 227-6722
Cell: (561) 459-6098
E-Mail: Miriam.rosario@myflfamilies.com

This task force has been active in the Broward 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!

Southeast Region - Circuit 15
111 South Sapodilla Avenue, West Palm Beach, FL 33401

BROWARD COUNTY REFUGEE TASK FORCE MEETING**INTRODUCTION**

The meeting was held via a conference call and Miriam Rosario, Southeast Region (SER) Community Liaison (CL), Refugee Services (RS) Program, Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) facilitated the Refugee Task Force (RTF) meeting. Miriam thanked and welcomed all participants for joining the meeting during these challenging times. The Task Force observed a moment of silence for all those affected worldwide by the spread of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19). The meeting was called to order and participants introduced themselves and the agencies they represented. Approximately 30 people joined the call.

SPECIAL PRESENTATION

Nesuan Jimenez, Office Manager at “Alive and Well Community Partners” and Ramona Noguera Washington, APRN & HIV Specialist at “Alive and Well Community Partners”, provided an overview presentation on the services their organization offers to the community. Some of these services include: AIDS Drug Assistance Program Treatments, AIDS Pharmaceutical Assistance, and Early Intervention Services (EIS). The organization can be reached at 1-800-434-1366, Extension 1008; Email: npnoguera.aliveandwell@gmail.com

NEW ISSUES/ACTION TAKEN

Oscar Rivera, director of Church World Service (CWS) in South Florida, provided an overview of the Comprehensive Refugee Services (CRS) program. He discussed how CRS services and referrals would be implemented in both Broward and Palm Beach counties. He described all CRS services including the RS Assessment, Tiered Case Management, Employment, Career Laddering, Adult Education, Child Care, and Mentoring services. He explained that the mentoring program would serve youth ages 15 to 24. Mentoring services will include services such as education and school guidance, gang prevention, and pairing students with university-level mentors that can provide support/guidance. CWS explained that Legal Services would be offered through St. Thomas University, Human Right Institute (STHRI). STHRI is located inside the CWS office. Adult Education will be offered through Project RENEW/Broward College. All referrals from the community for refugee services should go directly to the CWS CRS program. The CWS/Broward telephone number is 954-689-6466 and the contact staff are Francisco Figueroa (Administrator) and Edele Firmin (Coordinator). The CWS CRS program will work with Career Sources to complete work registration requirements.

GENERAL UPDATES/ANNOUNCEMENTS:

USCIS, Roketa Mansfield and Berta Cassidy, Community Relations Officers (CRO), Miami and Caribbean District U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, participated in the meeting. Berta spoke about USCIS and services during the Covid-19. USCIS offices are closed but are still accepting the forms by email and mail. All interviews, naturalization ceremonies and biometric collection appointments are postponed. However, USCIS will continue to provide emergency services during this time. For any emergency service request, please contact the USCIS Contact Center. Employees in these offices are continuing to perform mission-essential services that do not require face-to-face contact with the public. USCIS field offices will be sending notices to applicants and petitioners with scheduled appointments impacted by the public closure.

ESS/DCF- Wilber Roney announced he is retiring and said that a new staff member will be representing ESS at the next taskforce meeting. Miriam congratulated Wilber on behalf of the taskforce and thanked him for his continued dedication. Wilber then provided updates on ACCESS benefits. He explained that DCF storefronts are offering drop boxes where clients can physically leave applications and other documents. Staff will retrieve these documents daily. Documents can also be emailed or faxed. Additional information can be found on the DCF website.

RS/DCF – David Draper, DCF Refugee Services Community Liaison Manager, gave updates. He encouraged taskforce members to review/follow CDC guidelines. DCF RS will also be hosting weekly refugee services contracted provider conference calls to get updates from providers on the current state of operations. It was noted that DCF will be launching a COVID-19 information page soon (<https://www.myflfamilies.com/covid19/>). DCF ACCESS storefronts will be closing, but applications for benefits will continue online. If any applicants have questions, they can still contact DCF customer services: 1-850-300-4323 (available 8am to 5 pm, Monday to Friday). Refugee Task Force meetings will be conducted via phone conference for the months of March and April (and until further notice). Because of DCF travel restrictions, community liaisons will be conducting client engagement via phone with refugees. Regarding the DCF Refugee Services AmeriCorps VISTA program, recruitment and onboarding has been suspended through May (this decision was made by the Corporation for National and Community Services - CNCS). DCF RS will continue to send updates via email to refugee task force members. Miriam also reminded taskforce member to update their services and contact information with 211.

CareerSource of Broward (CSB)- Jaime Connelly, BSW, FCWP, Program Manager Welfare Transition & Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs stated that due to Coronavirus, CareerSource Broward was temporarily closing their administrative and career centers (as of 3/17/2020). CareerSource anticipates opening their offices on 3/30/20. CareerSource Broward will continue working remotely to assist customers. Individuals who have applied for temporary cash assistance are encouraged to complete work registration and orientation online. For more detailed information regarding offices, services, work registration, and orientation, individuals can visit <https://careersourcebroward.com/> or call Jaime at (954) 202-3830 Ext. 3126.

Broward County Library- Vonda Ward Bryant, Learning Services Coordinator, Broward County Library, stated that after careful consideration of COVID-19, all Broward County Library locations will be closed to the public starting on March 20, 2020. All libraries will remain closed to the public until further notice. However, during this time Broward County Library is taking steps to continue to support customers. The library offers free access to a wide range of online resources including thousands of eBooks, audiobooks, movies, TV shows, and classes. They also operate an online Youth Resources Center. More information on updates can be found at www.Broward.org/Library.

Broward County Library -Mary Cassell, Senior Librarian, West Regional Library offered a list of Community Resources to distribute to taskforce members. These include reduced cost internet options, food resources from Broward County Public Schools, and a free virtual platform from Baptist Health South Florida.

Broward County Family Success Administration/Community Action Agency- Audrey Ljung, Outreach Coordinator/Public Communications, stated that their offices are closed and they are not seeing clients. Clients with current applications for services (such as emergency assistance with utilities) can still drop off their completed application. Individuals with questions can call 954-357-5025.

CENSUS 2020- Ana Maria Diaz, Partnership Specialist CENSUS stated that the official launch of the 2020 Census is underway. When completing the census, individuals should include everyone living in their home on April 1, 2020. Ana stated that a complete and accurate counting of the local population is key to assuring that the diverse range of federal funding invested in local communities is appropriately apportioned. She stated the importance of educating the entire community on the importance of the completing the CENSUS (which can be completed online, through mail, or over the phone). The Census Bureau is required by law to turn in state population counts by December 31, 2020. Information/data can be found at www.2020census.gov. Ana Maria Diaz can be contacted at 678-938-9136.

Coast to Coast Legal Aid of South Florida Inc. (CCLASF)- Victoria Sexton, Attorney at Law, Coast to Coast Legal Aid of South Florida Inc. stated they have closed their office due to COVID-19. However, if an individual needs representation for certain time-sensitive issues (injunction for protection, restraining order, etc.) they may call immediately to begin the application process. Applications for time-sensitive cases will be accepted by phone only (Monday through Friday between the hours of 10am and Noon and 1:30pm to 4pm). Individuals should call 954-736-2495. For non-time-sensitive cases (divorce, establishing paternity, etc.), individuals should print out the application and submit online or via mail (www.coasttocoastlegalaidsouthflorida.org/family).

American Red Cross (ARC), Jaime Cruz, Service to the Armed Forces & International Services Specialist, stated that all local ARC offices are closed. The ARC is still offering all available services to those that need them. Individuals with questions can call 786-714-6796.

FL Highway Safety Motor Vehicle (FLHSMV) - Ulises Pacheco, Program Consultant, stated that to minimize exposure to COVID-19, beginning Thursday, March 19 through Sunday, April 19 all FLHSMV offices will be temporarily closed to the public. For information on online services individuals can visit us at www.FLHSMV.gov.

RS Contracted providers: Project RENEW (BC/PR); Jocelyne Martinez, Project RENEW Director/BC indicated that Project Renew is reviewing the process of providing online services to students. Broward College is currently closed due to COVID-19.

Church World Services, Oscar Rivera, indicated CWS is operating with a skeleton crew in the office. Before coming into the office, all clients are encouraged to call in and set up an appointment beforehand.

St. Thomas Human Rights Instituted (STHRI)- Christine Reis, Director Attorney informed the task force that they are providing legal services to refugees in Broward County at a new location (at Church World Service office). For details, individuals can call 954-361-3350.

NEXT MEETING:

Next Meeting: **Thursday, May 21, 2020**

Time: 10:00 AM to 12PM

Location: TBA

Contact: Miriam.Rosario@myflfamilies.com Phone: (561) 227-6722

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