



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

Ron DeSantis
Governor

Chad Poppell
Secretary

DATE: August 19, 2020

TO: Members of the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force

FROM: Janet Blair, Refugee Services (RS)

SUBJECT: **August 18, 2020** Meeting Minutes

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR:

Date: November 17th, 2020
Time: 1:30 P.M. – 3:30 P.M.
Location: Virtual Meeting
Janet Blair
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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 50 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.

This meeting was held via conference call with Janet Blair representing the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Refugee Service Program. A total of **57** individuals were present and the meeting was called to order at 1:32pm.

- Janet Blair opened the meeting with a welcome and did a roll call for introductions by phone.
- The Mental Health Minute was given by Stacy Kratz, Ph.D. The topic for this meeting was Intimate Partner Violence. Zenea Johnson provided local resources for survivors of domestic and intimate partner violence.

Provider & Community Partner Updates:

- The Department of Health update was given by Florence Ackey. She shared that all refugee clinic appointments are being scheduled for immunizations or exams. For clients applying for Legal Permanent Residency, medical exams are available. Also, all children returning to school in person or online should have the required immunizations. Call 813.307.8077 to schedule appointments. Finally, a reminder that Hillsborough County now requires that masks be worn in public for all individuals ages 5 and up.
- The update from Lutheran Services, Florida's (LSF) Comprehensive Refugee Services Program was given by Jackie Escandell and Milvia Marquez. LSF in Tampa continues to work with clients by appointments only with all assessments being done by phone. Employment services is steady and refugee clients continue to be placed in jobs. LSF staff do a food drive every Monday with 50 boxes of fresh food going to eligible families. In all programs combined, LSF has served 1300 clients this fiscal year. 637 were served in the employment program. For resettlement, there are a total of 90 projected arrivals for next fiscal year. Refugees will be arriving from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Colombia, Iraq and El Salvador.
- LSF has launched a new education program and hired Stacy Beachuamp as a new manager overseeing mentoring, cultural orientation and the new K-12 education program. The mentoring program is recruiting youth and young adults ages 15-24 and volunteer mentors to be paired with them. Especially needed are volunteer mentors who speak Swahili and Arabic. The new education program will serve all school aged kids with a focus on those under age 15 and those who arrived through the resettlement program. Please contact Stacy at stacy.beauchamp@lsfnet.org to get involved as a volunteer tutor or mentor.
- The Gulf Coast Jewish Family & Community Services (GCJFCS) update was given by Sr Program Manager, Sylvia Acevedo. GCJFCS has launched a Microenterprise program that is helping refugee women start small businesses. The microenterprise program provides small loans, technical assistance and financial literacy. GCJFCS led this year's World Refugee Day event held virtually on June 18th. This year's event had an interfaith focus and highlighted refugees speaking about their experiences. The event was well received and well attended.

- GCJFCS continues providing client services in Pinellas County with staff working remotely and at times from the office. In addition to the subcontract with LSF for Refugee Services, GCJFCS also has Match Grant and Resettlement & Placement programs. Finally, GCJFCS received federal funding to assist eligible clients with rent, utilities, legal, medical costs. The mentoring program is growing with 3 matches to date. The youth program has 17 students and all are ready to be matched with mentors. Anyone interested in volunteering should contact AmeriCorps Vista staff member Michaela Inks at Michaela.Inks@gcjfcs.org
- The Hillsborough County Schools Adult Education Program—CARIBE update was given by program director, Ron Cruz. Classes are being held online now and students can still enroll. Registration can be done by calling the office at (813) 231-1972 ext.320 or by emailing Caribe_program@outlook.com. CARIBE plans to gradually start face to face classes on August 31st on a voluntary basis, for students who want/need to be in this type of class. This is subject to change. Online will continue to be offered. Also, the program is still offering bus passes to students and has computers to loan out for registered students. Several surveys have been conducted with students and it appears that 80% would like to stay online only until the pandemic ends. There is a small population of current students who want/need face-to-face classes, and these are mostly low-level literacy/low English level students.
- The USCIS update was emailed by Don Jarrell who was not able to be present for the meeting. USCIS fee increases goes into effect on October 2, 2020. The Tampa USCIS office is scheduling interviews, ceremonies, and ASC appointments, albeit at a reduced capacity due to the pandemic. Also, unless Congress provides funding, USCIS is currently planning to furlough 75% of its workforce at the end of August. Interviews, ASC appointments, and ceremonies will be majorly reduced if this occurs. Finally, Don Jarrell has a new email address: TampaDistrictCommunityRelations@uscis.dhs.gov
- The Economic Self Sufficiency (ESS) program of DCF was represented by Christine McKee from the Program Office. Christine thanked everyone for all of the work being done during these very challenging times. She recommended checking the website for regular updates at <https://www.myflfamilies.com/covid19/access.shtml>. The call center can also assist clients, 850-300-4323 is the best number to use. Also, providers can call Christine with any specific questions at 239-771-0680 or email her at Christine.McKee@myflfamilies.com
- The University of South Florida (USF) was represented by two professors in the Anthropology Department, Dr. Robbie Baer and Dr. Dillon Mahoney. Baer continues to work on the second edition of the American Stories oral history project and is also working on a new cookbook in collaboration with Radiant Kitchens. Mahoney led an evaluation project with refugee clients from the DRC on what they knew and understood about Covid-19. One key finding is that there is a high degree of understanding about the virus and how to stay safe. However, the jobs held by refugees do not always make staying safe possible. Additional evaluations are being done with Arabic and Spanish speaking refugee populations. Those interested in receiving a copy of the studies can email baer@usf.edu or Dillon.j.mahoney@gmail.com
- The school system updates were given by Lesleigh Lopez from Hillsborough County Schools and Ericka Reckenwald from Pinellas County Schools.
- Pinellas County Schools (PCS) are scheduled to reopen for both face-to-face and virtual classes on August 24th. There are set guidelines/protocols for all PCS students and staff to ensure safety. Parents

will need to screen children daily prior to sending students to school. Students in need of devices should contact their assigned school. Many resources in English and Spanish can be found at <https://www.pcsb.org/> and anyone with questions can contact Ericka at reckenwalde@pcsb.org

- Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) are scheduled to reopen virtually on August 24th and in person classes will open August 31st. HCPS webpage has a lot of information in both English and Spanish at <https://www.sdhc.k12.fl.us/>. Parents can make or change their choices for students at this link. All safety precautions will be followed at schools and parents need to make sure that their contact information is up to date with their children's school.
- The Refugee and Migrant Women's Initiative (RAMWI) continues to provide food pickup and delivery for families in need every 2 weeks. RAMWI continues to also provide ongoing support for refugee women through a new mentor program and is working on creating an online boutique to sell items made locally.
- Project Prosper program continues to provide financial literacy classes online. There is a new program coordinator who can be reached at richard@projectprosper.org Project Prosper continues to offer 0% interest loans and is adjusting their eligibility criteria to fit the current crisis so all who are interested are encouraged to apply. Project Prosper's board member Robin Warren won The Lightning Award and the program is using the funds to conduct a needs assessment. This involves looking nationwide at financial literacy programs and also reaching out locally to speak with providers and clients in order to see what financial needs are present in the community.
- The Sew Much Hope program continues to support refugee women in St Petersburg. Their new online store has launched at www.sewmuchhopeproject.com All purchases on this site are directed to the refugee women who created them.
- During the month of September, the Largo and Pinellas Park Libraries will hold the annual Welcome Week Donation Drive again this year but will do it in an entirely virtual format. No donations will be taken directly to the library. A flyer with detailed information will be sent to all task force members.

Upcoming Events/Meetings

Mental Health Team Meeting: August 26th, 9:30am on Zoom

Task Force Quarterly Task Force Meeting: Nov. 17th, 1:30pm, location TBA

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