



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

Ron DeSantis
Governor

Chad Poppell
Secretary

DATE: August 1, 2019
TO: Members of the South West Florida Refugee Task Force
FROM: Janet Blair, Refugee Services (RS)
SUBJECT: July 31 Meeting Minutes

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR:

Date: November 6, 2019
Time: 1:00-3:00pm
Location: DCF Office, 2295 Victoria
Ave, Fort Myers, FL 33901

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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 twenty people 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 next meeting!

SWFL REFUGEE TASK FORCE MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was held at the Department of Health located at 2200 Ringling Blvd in Sarasota. Janet Blair, Community Liaison, represented the Dept. of Children & Families (DCF). Sixteen people were present and the meeting was called to order at 1:05.

PRESENTATIONS

- The first presentation was given by Greg Hejlik of the Florida RX Card program. This is a free prescription program that is available to all individuals including those who are uninsured, or have Medicaid, Medicare and private insurance. This card is accepted at all major pharmacies and can lower medication costs from 25% to 85%. More information can be found at www.FloridaRxCard.com
- The second presentation was given by Neal Dollar of the Atlanta Regional Census Center. The Census will begin in April of 2020 and will determine funding for federal programs for the following 10 years. Low response areas and hard to reach populations are a concern and the Census Bureau is already conducting outreach and training to ensure that all are counted. All data given to the Census Bureau will be protected and cannot be released for 72 years. No information will be released to immigration services or law enforcement. Training is available for community groups including ethnic organizations and faith communities who may be able to reach populations that the general census will not reach. More information on the Census can be found at <https://www.census.gov/>
- The final presentation was given by Edward McCrane of the Sarasota County Emergency Management Agency on hurricane preparedness. It is key for our clients to know their evacuation level and have a plan in place should a hurricane hit this season. Hurricane season runs June 1st through November 30th and this season is expected to be an average one with two major hurricanes and multiple tropical storms. Since last season's experience with Hurricane Irma, new services are in place throughout the state including transportation being provided to shelters, more shelters being identified for both the general population and medically needy individuals and more shelters receiving pets. Each county has a website with full details. In Sarasota County information can be found at <https://www.scgov.net/government/emergency-services/hurricane-preparedness>

DCF, PROVIDER & COMMUNITY UPDATES

- Information on the ACCESS Community Partner Network and the new Customer Authentication Pilot project was given by Christine McKee, the Community Partner Liaison Coordinator. The Suncoast Region is piloting a new customer authentication program with community partners in SWFL to provide face-to-face authentication sites at selected sites impacted by DCF office closures. If the pilot project goes well, it will be expanded throughout the state. It is important to note that the customer authentication pilot is separate from the community partner network and is only being offered at selected sites located near DCF offices that have been closed.
- Lutheran Services, Florida's SWFL Comprehensive Refugee Services program shared that they are seeing more clients arriving with documentation that prohibits them from applying for employment authorization. The program has enrolled 121 clients since October 1, 2018 that have been issued documentation such as I220's and I862's which do not enable them to apply for EAD cards. This is a contractual concern as the program's employment outcomes will be impacted more and more.
- Catholic Charities continues to serve Ukrainian clients through their match grant program and partnership with Gulf Coast Jewish Family & Community Services.
- Collier County Health Department staff was not able to attend the meeting but sent a report saying they have served 242 clients this fiscal year with 10 being Haitian, 2 being Venezuelans and the remainder being Cubans.
- University of South Florida professor Jody McBrien has just published a book and more info can be found at <https://brill.com/abstract/title/55129>
- CAIR (The Council on American-Islamic Relations) has opened a new program located in Fort Myers and the attorney, Ahmed Khan, can be reached at 813-270-1121. The program provides free legal services to all who qualify.
- There is a new program, Peace4Manasota that is working toward having both Manatee and Sarasota counties become fully trauma-informed communities by the end of 2020. Elida Mujic, DCF Client Relations Coordinator, is working with this program and wants to link both SWFL task forces to the initiative. Task force members expressed an interest in working with the organization and we will invite them to upcoming meetings.

NEXT MEETING: November 6th from 1:00-3:00pm in Fort Myers

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