



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

**Ron DeSantis**  
Governor

**Chad Poppell**  
Secretary

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**DATE:** January 25, 2019

**TO:** Members of the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force

**FROM:** Janet Blair, Refugee Services (RS)

**SUBJECT:** January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2019 Meeting Minutes

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

**Date:** April 30th, 2019  
**Time:** 1:30 P.M. – 3:30 P.M.  
**Location:** Main Auditorium, 9393 North  
Florida Ave, Tampa, FL  
**Contact:** 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 55 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.***

The meeting was held at the Department of Children and Families located at 9393 North Florida Ave, Tampa, FL. Janet Blair and David Draper represented the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Refugee Service Program. A total of 63 were present and the meeting was called to order at 1:35pm.

### **Presentations:**

- The first presentation was from the Bulambo family who are leaders of the newly formed Umoja Ni Nguvu organization, which means Unity is Power. This Congolese organization is seeking to be the umbrella under which all initiatives in the Tampa Bay area work under in order to serve refugees from the DRC and assist them in becoming self-sufficient. Main concerns of the organization at this point are as follows:
  1. Children and youth being placed by age into the school system when they do not have an educational background or language skills. They would like to offer a special orientation for these students and look for ways to help them succeed.
  2. Congolese single mothers are the most vulnerable in the refugee community. The organization will create a database of all single parent families and reach out to help them.
  3. They also want to reach out to other vulnerable community members including orphans, widows, the disabled, seniors and those who have medical issues.
  4. Eventually they would like to create a preschool for the community, do training on hygiene issues, help with employment for those in need and have social/cultural programs for youth as well as special outreach for those who are seniors and ailing.
- The second presentation was a brief announcement by Norma Reno, president of the Casa de Venezuela of Tampa Bay organization. She announced that there are currently over 20,000 from Venezuela in the Tampa Bay area. While some are seeking asylum, many are also concerned about being denied asylum and are staying in the community without documentation. Casa de Venezuela is offering English classes & civic classes to educate the community as well as support services for those in need. Task Force members will stay connected with this and other organizations serving those from Venezuela to ensure that they are aware of the services we can provide for those who qualify and are in need.
- A third presentation was given by Professor Robbie Baer from University of South Florida's Department of Anthropology. This nutrition focused research with the Congolese community was conducted in 2016 and uncovered numerous issues including food insecurity and school bullying which the task force has been attempting to address. This research project focused on interviews with 12 families from the DRC as well as 6 focus groups. One key finding is that the majority of Congolese youth depend on having two meals a day at school. When they are bullied and avoid the cafeteria, this seriously impacts their nutrition. The full results of this research project will be published and made available to task force members. One article has already been published on the research process in *Practicing Anthropology*, Vol.41, No 1, Winter 2019.

- The Mental Health Minute was presented by Stacy Kratz, PhD, on behalf of the mental health subcommittee. The focus of this presentation was on cultivating cultural humility rather than cultural competency. Learning about culture is an ongoing process, rather than something we become “competent” with and complete.

## **Refugee Services Update**

- Janet Blair shared the results of the Task Force survey. Goals and plans for 2019 include:
  1. Wanting to hear more directly from refugees in the community, incorporate them into meetings and events to ensure they have a voice.
  2. Working to address bullying issues with Hillsborough County Schools
  3. Learning more about Congolese culture.
  4. Ensuring that we are aware of who to contact in each agency/program and the services provided.
  5. Having a stronger social media and online presence to provide resources & share information.
- David Draper discussed the DCF Refugee Services AmeriCorps Vista program that is operating throughout Florida. He introduced two new Vista members working in the Tampa Bay area. He also gave an update on leadership changes within DCF (announced Chad Poppell as the new DCF Secretary).

## **General Updates**

- USCIS announced remotely that the lapse in public funding does not affect the majority of USCIS operations. Field offices remain open and interviews and appointments are continuing as scheduled. If there are constituents who have cases in immigration court, they could be affected as the immigration courts are being affected by the furlough. Also, the Tampa Field Office currently does not have a Field Office Director. Patricia Kemling accepted another position and left at the end of December. The two branch managers, Lisa Robertson and Devon Perkiss are alternating as Acting Field Office Directors until a selection for a new FOD has been made.
- Funds for food assistance in February will be loaded onto existing SNAP cards this month due to the government shut-down. There will be no additional funds loaded in February, so families need to budget accordingly.
- A donation drive for hygiene products is being undertaken by the task force. These items cannot be purchased with SNAP cards and are sorely needed. A full list of needs will be sent out to task force members.
- A donation drive for homeless kits is also being collected by RAMWI (Refugee and Migrant Women's Initiative). These kits will be put together on Saturday, Feb. 9<sup>th</sup> by refugee women wanting to give back to the community. Kits will then be donated to several local homeless programs. Details on needed items will be emailed to the task force.
- A planning meeting for World Refugee Day 2019 will be held on January 24<sup>th</sup> at Clearwater Library. The event will be held once again at Pinellas Technical College on June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019.
- The Outreach Committee is meeting on January 29<sup>th</sup> at 10am at Dickenson Elementary School to formulate outreach strategies with a focus on reaching out to asylees.
- A refugee soccer match will be held on Saturday, Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup> in Lutz. More details on the game will be emailed to task force members.

**Upcoming TF Meetings for 2019: April 30<sup>th</sup>/ August 27<sup>th</sup>/ December 10<sup>th</sup>**

All meetings in 2019 will be held from 1:30-3:30pm in the Main Auditorium at the Department of Children & Families located at 9393 N Florida Ave in Tampa.