



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

Rick Scott
Governor

Mike Carroll
Secretary

DATE: November 14, 2018
TO: Members of the Southwest Florida Refugee Task Force
FROM: Janet Blair, Refugee Services (RS)
SUBJECT: November 7th Meeting Minutes

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR:

Date: February 13th
Time: 1:00-3:00pm
Location: Florida Department of Health 2200
Ringling, Blvd, Sarasota, FL 34237.

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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 20 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 USCIS (United States Citizenship & Immigration Services) Fort Myers Field Office located at 4220 Executive Circle, Suite 1, Fort Myers, FL 33916. Regional Community Liaison, Janet Blair, represented the Florida Dept. of Children & Families (DCF). Twenty-seven people were present and the meeting was called to order at 1:10pm.

PRESENTATIONS

- The first presentation was given by Mary Meador from the United Way. She shared information on the United Way's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program (VITA) which offers free tax preparation by IRS certified volunteers for households with incomes of \$66,000 or less. The VITA program has bilingual staff speaking Spanish and Haitian Creole and is located throughout Lee County. It is a nation-wide program and can be located in each county through the United Way. More information on this program can be found at <http://www.unitedwaylee.org>
- The second presentation was given by Melissa Baker from Lee County Libraries. She focused on sharing resources and programs for English Language Learners (ELL's) such as the English Café which is held at all library locations and provides ELL's with an opportunity to practice conversational English for 90 minutes once per week. This program is free and open to all who speak a bit of English to get started. Additionally, the library system has printed and digital resources in many different languages, software for learning English and 72 other languages, as well as citizenship and GED preparation and practice tests. Many of their digital resources are available on phone apps for added convenience. More information on library services can be found at <https://www.leegov.com/library>
- The final presentation was by Shelly Randall and Don Jarrell of USCIS. The Fort Myers office should be fully staffed by the end of this year. Citizenship ceremonies are being held on Tuesdays and Thursdays with an average of 300 naturalizations each month. USCIS has Federal Register Notices on the proposed changes to fee waivers and the public charge inadmissibility at the following locations online:
Fee waivers: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/09/28/2018-21101/agency-information-collection-activities-revision-of-a-currently-approved-collection-request-for-fee>
Public charge: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/10/10/2018-21106/inadmissibility-on-public-charge-grounds>
- Some discussion was held on the concept of public charges. Most clients in this area are not aware of this potential issue. Although it will not affect refugees, the change in policy could be of concern for Cuban and Haitian Entrants and Parolees. USCIS is still receiving feedback at the above locations regarding what should and should not be considered, however nothing is

certain at this time. Nirupa Netram, Immigration Program Officer with the Southwest Florida Community Foundation offered to send materials from a training on this topic to the task force.

- A recap of the Welcoming Week events was given by Jacqueline Matthews from LSF. Events celebrating employers and employees were held in Sarasota, Fort Meyers and Naples.

PROVIDER & COMMUNITY UPDATES

- Employment Authorizations Documents (EAD's) are still taking a long time and there are 3-4 month gaps between application for Legal Permanent Resident (LPR) status and/or EAD renewal and expiration of the current EAD's which is a challenge with employment. USCIS cannot grant any extensions but encourages providers to apply for LPR status or EAD renewal several months early if possible for clients.
- The ACCESS/ESS program of DCF was represented by Denise Garbin and she encouraged providers to send copies of client ID's with their applications. ACCESS was recently monitored and had several citations for RAP cases with no ID. Also, it is important for providers to know that when a Notice to Appear and an I-94 are presented, the date on the Notice to Appear is the entry date that is used for benefits regardless of the length of time the client may have been detained.
- Lutheran Services CRS program was represented by program director, Rose Marie Connor. She reported that currently there at 7,000 clients still eligible in the SWFL region for refugee services. She also shared that the Collier & Lee offices are looking at possible relocations to be closer to clients. In Fort Myers, 50% of clients live in Cape Coral and 50% are in Lehigh Acres.
- The Dept. of Health was represented by Sharon Paterson from the Naples Refugee Health Clinic. She shared that ORR had changed the timeframe for the initial physical to be completed within 90 days. She also shared that the I-93 medical exam for LPR expires in 60 days, so it is important for clients to wait until within 60 days of their application date to ensure it is valid and does not have to be redone.
- Janet shared that Refugee Services data for FFY 2018. There were a total of 162 new arrivals to Collier County, 145 arrivals to Lee County and 80 arrivals to Sarasota/Manatee Counties with 9 additional arrivals in outlying counties in SWFL. This is a total number of 396 arrivals for FFY18.
- Janet also went over meeting dates for 2019 and distributed a survey to get feedback from task force members on the content, times and locations of the meetings.

NEXT MEETING: February 13th in Sarasota

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