



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

**Rick Scott**  
*Governor*

**Mike Carrol**  
*Secretary*

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## **MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** December 20, 2018

**TO:** Members of the Tallahassee Refugee Task Force

**FROM:** Theresa Leslie, Refugee Services (RS)

**SUBJECT:** Task Force Meeting Minutes for December 11, 2018

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

**Date:** March 12, 2019  
**Time:** 10:00 AM to 11:30 PM  
**Location:** Department of Children and Families  
1317 Winewood Blvd, Bldg 3,  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399  
**Contact:** Theresa Leslie  
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This task force has been active in the Tallahassee 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 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, 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.

**TALLAHASSEE AREA REFUGEE TASK FORCE MEETING****INTRODUCTION**

The meeting was held at the Department of Children and Families Conference Room, Bldg 3 site and Theresa Leslie, Community Liaison represented (DCF), Refugee Services (RS) Program. The meeting was called to order and participants introduced themselves and the agency they represent.

**PRESENTATION**

Larry Messinger, a 15-year Volunteer with the American Red Cross traveled from Panama City Beach to conduct a presentation to the Tallahassee Refugee Task Force regarding one of their important programs, "Restoring Family Links". He mentioned that he is personally assigned cases that he manages to search for missing family members in 93 countries. The fact they he and other volunteers rarely give up even though it could take years to find the family speaks to their dedication.

Mr. Messinger stated that the chaos and confusion that accompany war, disaster, and international migration can separate families when they need each other. This is appropriate for several of our refugees who needed to quickly flee their countries for their own safety and have not heard from their relatives in a very long time. Even those in refugee camps often lose track of other family members.

Mr. Messinger said he would like to attend the TF meeting in Sept 2019 to update their work and learn if any refugees need help in contacting family members on an international basis.

**Update on the work of the International Rescue Committee (IRC),** the Comprehensive Refugee Services provider in the NW Region, Leon County.

- It was reported IRC expect is expecting 150 new arrivals for the coming fiscal year, October 1, 2018 to September 30, 2019. The Match Grant slots will be announced later but Ms. Bilic is anticipating about 80 grant slots.
- Interviews have begun for the AmeriCorps VISTA position to support the provider in their activities to acculturate refugee clients to their new life in the United States.

One applicant accepted the position in Tallahassee but later withdrew his application.

- As IRC reminded the participants that as a group we need to address the English and school tutoring needs of the children and adults during their R&P and Case Management involvement. The provider continues to focus on recruitment of employers that offer on-the job training, career laddering, and mentorship/internship, and further community outreach. This is an ongoing effort.
- Leon County Schools Coordinator, Jessica Chapman introduced her office's new ESOL Coordinator, Lisa Urban who will guide and support the coordinators at each of the schools. Ms. Urban will help the many new refugee students that have recently enrolled at Bond Elementary and Nims Middle School.
- Ms. Urban will make frequent visits to the schools to check on the students who are learning English and keep the provider informed about the progress and critical challenges that need to be stressed. Ms. Urban seemed very enthused about her new position and is a welcome addition to the Task Force.
- It was fortunate that Ms. Urban was able to meet the two FSU coordinators of the Migrant and Refugee Education Alliance (MREA), Liv McConnel and Samantha Kunin. This meeting generated a group discussion with the task force on the issues, challenges, and practices that are currently being addressed this school year.
- It was mentioned that sixty students are enrolled at Bond Elementary and Nims Middle School with the numbers regularly increasing each month. This is a huge workload to these two schools as most of the Congolese Refugee population has moved to Holton Apartments. Formally the refugee students were primarily attending the public schools in the eastern part of the county. FSU tutors will be an asset to the students and teachers. Ms Urban and the leadership of MREA will be working in partnership to ensure that the transition of the students to their new schools is supportive to the teachers and students.
- With the hiring of a new Vista employee the teachers and ESOL coordinators should notice the support with the regular scheduling of the tutors. Again, the task force members were reminded that all of the students are attending school for the first time regardless of their age.

## **EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AND PRACTICE**

- It was mentioned that the dilemma for the adult clients to continue their practice and learning of English after they begin working full or part times is an on-going issue in this community as well as others around the state. It was reported how other regions have initiated Saturday and evening ESOL classes that are conveniently located close to where clients live. This has proven successful for the clients and given providers another opportunity to reach more clients.
- At Holton Apartments, where the majority of refugees live, there are no community rooms available. Dr. Victoria Warner, a new Task Force member from FAMU suggested that she could contact the church close by to see if they could offer accommodations for weekend and/or evening classes. Other participants committed to offer their ideas for alternative locations as they come up. The Literacy Volunteers discussed their efforts to offer evening classes for ESOL and GED prep at the Perry Library close to Holton Apt.
- Theresa Leslie agreed to follow up with Dr. Warner for ESOL class sites and need to expand this search for instructors at Adult and Community Education (ACE), namely the ESOL and GED coordinator at ACE and Literacy Volunteers for Leon County.

## **EMPLOYMENT ACTIVITIES**

- The RS Community Liaison, Ms. Leslie reported that these past months have allowed the provider to increase their efforts to establish stronger and more promising job opportunities for refugees. This will allow refugees to gain a confident sense of economic self-sufficiency within their community. All refugee employment and adult education service providers around the state are engaged in a similar effort.
- IRC reported that staff met with the management of a meat packing plant, FPL in Cairo, Georgia that supplies meat to Walmart. Twelve refugees were recruited to work in the plant which offered a higher wage than their current jobs at Marpan, a recycling plant. The meat packing company at first offered to have a van pick up the employees but soon a few refugees bought used cars and now drive in car pools to work 5-6 days a week. If they are still employed after 3 months they will receive a substantial raise. Both male and female refugees are working at the plant and seem satisfied with their jobs. They dress warm and have adapted to the chilly environment. Manufacturing jobs is exactly what the refugees have been requesting.

- IRC's Employment Specialist has continued strengthening ties to Florida State University (FSU), Food Service Program, Sydexo. This company manages several restaurants and dining facilities on campus and is willing to give priority hiring to local refugees. This is convenient as it is on a bus route from their apartments and has varied shifts and hours. The same arrangement has been sought with Florida Agriculture and Mechanical University (FAMU). The downfall of this employment site is that summer hours are greatly reduced.
- FAMU has offered refugees a few jobs in their Maintenance Department. It is hoped these partnerships for employment are successful and expand.
- A few refugees have been attending their English classes in the morning and early afternoon at ACE then reporting for work at FSU in late afternoon for the evening shift. Hopefully, by example other refugees will follow this schedule.
- It was also reported that a former refugee from Egypt owns a local used car business and has been supportive in helping other refugees purchase reliable cars.
- The task force group was reminded by the Community Liaison that IRC provider staff, community partners, and task force members need to continually advocate for other sources of employment during their on-going community activities.

## **COLLEGE STUDENTS AS VOLUNTEER TUTORS**

- Theresa Leslie provided an update from the FSU group called Migrant and Refugee Education Alliance who are familiar with the Task Force. This group is led by Olivia (Liv) McDonnell, Presidential Scholar who works with other students to organize efforts to tutor approximately 60 refugee students 3 days a week at school. This is a continuation of the group's efforts from the last school year. Today Samantha (Sami) Kunin also on the board of this group, gave the following report.
- This group of fifty plus tutor-volunteers have been assigned a refugee student and have selected time slots that do not interfere with their college classes. Since many of the student tutors were familiar with the Arabic language they were assigned to the Syrian students while gradually taking on the Congolese students. Student tutors are committed to tutoring 3 days a week for one class period. Up to this past August this effort has been coordinated with the Althea Valle, Leon County School, ESOL Coordinator.

- Sami mentioned that those tutors can also work with the students in their homes and at the apartment complexes where they live. The provider added that this is an excellent resource.
- Two faith-based groups of volunteers have also been tutoring Congolese and Syrian students since the beginning of 2017. Most of the students have been assigned their own tutor. It is important to recognize that some of the tutors also participate in homework help at the students' home or at one of the faith-based agencies. Volunteer tutors will also be recruited from FAMU as well.

**Next Meeting:** Tuesday, March 12 2019  
10:00 to 11:30 AM  
Department of Children and Families  
1317 Winewood Blvd, Bldg 3, Rm 202  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

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