



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

**Rick Scott**  
Governor

**Mike Carrol**  
Secretary

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## **MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** March 21, 2018  
**TO:** Members of the Tallahassee Refugee Task Force  
**FROM:** Theresa Leslie, Refugee Services (RS)  
**SUBJECT:** Task Force Meeting Minutes March 20, 2018

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

**Date:** World Refugee Day event on June 26, 2018 substitutes for June Task Force meeting  
**Time:** 10:00 AM to 12:30 PM  
**Location:** Adult and Community Education  
526 Appleyard  
Tallahassee, Florida 32305  
**Contact:** Theresa Leslie  
**Office:** (850) 778-4065  
**Cell:** (850) 445-4040  
**E-Mail:** Theresa.Leslie@myflfamilies.com

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 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 meeting!***

2383 Phillips Rd. Tallahassee, FL 32308

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

The meeting was held at the Adult and Community Education 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 represented.

**INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE PROVIDER UPDATE**

Una Bilic, Site Manager with International Rescue Committee reported that there has been a reduction in the number of refugees moving into Leon County. IRC has seen a slight increase in confirmed arrivals since the beginning of Federal Fiscal Year, October 1, 2017. She often repeats that continuing the English learning with classes and other tutoring and securing full time employment are the priority challenges.

- Ms. Bilic gave an overview about the successes and challenges of resettling refugee families while meeting all the mandatory but very worthwhile requirements such as: medical screening including school immunizations and lab/blood work, ACCESS enrollment for public benefits including Medicaid, Social Security enrollment for each refugee, and school enrollment for the children and ESOL enrollment for the adults.
- Not all initial processes are mandatory but others are very helpful, such as: obtaining bus passes, Division of Motor Vehicles official picture identification, basic orientation to life in the U.S. and shortly after arriving adult refugees participate in several workshops and orientations related to employment. Ms. Bilic often reviews these initial activities as it is important for the community partners present to be aware of what happens within the first few weeks of the client's arrival.
- IRC's Comprehensive Refugee Services contract with the Department of Children and Families has been the main focus of their program although this same provider is the Reception and Placement provider for newly arrived refugees. Case Management activities in order to maintain current on client's resettlement is of utmost importance as reported by Ms. Bilic.
- As reminded at each Task Force meeting, IRC staff continues to address the English and school tutoring needs of the children and adults during their R&P and Case Management involvement. They also continue to focus on recruitment of employers that offer on-the-job training, career ladder, and mentorship/internship, and further community outreach.
- Ms. Bilic announced their office will be moving and will send out notices of their new address by early May. Dustin Daniels, Chief of Staff from the Mayor's Office, City of Tallahassee offered to assist in finding rental property and has a list of landlords who are willing to rent to non-profit agencies.

**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's Employment Specialist has strengthened ties to Florida State University (FSU), Food Service Program, Sydeco. 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 is being sought with Florida Agriculture and Mechanical University (FAMU).

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.

**Marpan**, the local recycling plant located 6020 Woodville Hwy, Tallahassee, FL 32305 has hired several refugees on a full-time basis. Refugee employees are frequently offered overtime hours to work if they wish. It is helpful that they are open 6 days a week, Monday-Saturday which gives flexibility to their spouses to work also for another employer. One refugee recently bought a used car and picks up other refugees and drives them to and from work. A former refugee from Egypt owns a used car business and has been supportive in helping other refugees purchase reliable used cars.

It was reported by the Community Liaison that IRC provider staff, community partners, and task force members continually advocate for other sources of employment during their on-going community activities. This message has to be constant as there are unique challenges with the Congolese population. This is not always successful as even janitorial jobs at the hospital needs their staff to at least understand English especially as security code announcements are provided via their intercom system. The hospital is very pleased with 2 of their refugee staff that work in the file room but came to the United States speaking some English.

### **COLLEGE STUDENTS AS VOLUNTEER TUTORS**

Theresa Leslie provided an update from the FSU group called Migrant and Refugee Education Alliance. This group is led by Olivia 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) Cunin 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. This effort has been coordinated with the Althea Valle, Leon County School, ESOL Coordinator.

Sami mentioned that those tutors who remain in summer school will work with the students in their homes and at the apartment complexes where they live. The provider added that this is excellent news.

Two other faith based groups of volunteers have also been tutoring Congolese and Syrian students since the beginning of 2017. Just about all 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 their faith based agency.

Volunteer tutors will also be recruited from FAMU as well.

Kelly Rameriz, a Service Scholar from FSU was introduced. She explained how she used her years of experience tutoring students from several different countries into working directly with teachers in Leon County. She started her tutoring while in high school in Okeechobee, Florida. She reported how she has worked with teachers, ESOL coordinators, and reading instructors from Bond Elementary and Nims Middle Schools that have are new to teaching refugees with no English language skills.

This was an important undertaking but make a huge difference in the teacher's confidence to work with the Congolese students. It was noted that while the Congolese students are learning English, there still is a deficit in their reading and writing skills.

### **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PARTNER**

An Attorney from Legal Services of North Florida, Leo Varias made an announcement during the meeting that his organization has been awarded a grant to promote and advocate for Domestic Violence (DV) Services though out the four county area they represent. He has been assigned Leon County and is the liaison to each program in this county that offers a wide variety of DV services.

Mr. Varias encouraged the participants to take his informational materials and make them available to their clients, friends, co-workers, faith-based groups, health departments, and other health professionals. He offered his number and email to help in any way he can and is able to speak to other groups or individual family members. The web site below has many links and the Client Success Stories is particularly interesting. Office hours and address for each county office is listed as well as the types of services they offer. Mr. Varias reminded the group that legal services from this organization are located in Franklin, Jefferson, Leon and Wakulla counties.

It is interesting to note that Mr. Varias is a refugee from Cuba. He was an attorney in Cuba but went back to law school at FSU and graduated so he can practice law in Florida. While in law school he was an active volunteer working directly with refugees in Leon County.

**Contact Information** for Legal Services of North Florida

<https://www.lsnf.org/services-overview/>

2119 Delta Blvd  
Tallahassee, FL 32303  
(850) 385-9007

## **SOCIAL EXPERIENCES**

As reported by representatives from City Church and the Mormon Church, IRC staff and other volunteers have taken refugee youngsters to the circus, local parks, church functions, birthday celebrations, and picnics. Student and faith-based volunteers plan for as many social activities as possible and include their parents as well.

## **PROGRAM AND RESOURCE UPDATES**

**Adult Education:** One of the Adult and Community Education ESOL Instructors invited anyone from the Task Force who would like to sit in an ESOL class to call Elizabeth Daniels, 850-717-2020, 24 hours in advance. She expressed the school's commitment to teaching English to the refugees while also making them feel welcome in their new community. Tours of their educational site were offered directly after the meeting.

**Department of Health:** Refugee Health reported how they keep aware of all federal, state, and local policies and updates. As medical assessments for all newly arriving refugees are required, they are still assisting local public health units even while there has been a reduction in these appointments.

**Next Meeting:** Tuesday, March 20, 2017  
10:00 to Noon  
Adult and Community Education  
526 Appleyard Drive  
Tallahassee, FL 32305

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