



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

**Rick Scott**  
Governor

**Mike Carrol**  
Secretary

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## **MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** January 11, 2018  
**TO:** Members of the Tallahassee Refugee Task Force  
**FROM:** Theresa Leslie, Refugee Services (RS)  
**SUBJECT:** Meeting Minutes Dec 2017 meeting held Jan 9, 2018 at Provider Request

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

**Date:** March 20, 2018  
**Time:** 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM  
**Location:** Adult and Community Education  
526 Appleyard  
Tallahassee, Florida 32305  
**Contact:** Theresa Leslie  
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**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 International Rescue Committee (IRC), the local Comprehensive Refugee Services provider for Department of Children and Families (DCF) in Leon County at 124 Marriott Drive, Tallahassee, Florida 32301. Theresa Leslie, Community Liaison represented (DCF), Refugee Services (RS) Program. Rebecca Lockenbach, Refugee Services, Contract Manager was also present at this meeting. Dec 2017 Task Force meeting was postponed at the request of the provider to January 9, 2018. The meeting was called to order and participants introduced themselves and the agency they represented while reporting new policies, programs and updates.

Una Bilic, Site Manager with International Rescue Committee reported that there has been a reduction in the number of refugees moving into Leon County. Although there have been a few arrivals since February 2017, IRC has seen a slight increase in confirmed arrivals since the beginning of Federal Fiscal Year, October 1, 2017. 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.

- Ms. Bilic announced that International Rescue Committee in Tallahassee will be conducting Reception and Placement (R&P) Consultation Meetings with a similar format to the Refugee Task Force Meetings. These meetings will not have as many participants as the Task Force but will be discussing the R&P period that her agency provides services to newly arriving clients. Refugee clients can remain in their Reception and Placement program from three to six months. The activities below are a few of the activities and service that occur during R&P.
- The critical importance of attending English classes and specific tutoring activities along with Employment Orientation and hopefully a job placement are some of the critical goals of this time period.
- Participants at the Reception and Placement Consultation meetings will report specific challenges and strengths of the activities and client accomplishments. "How Is The Community Doing?" will outline next steps for this group. Specific solutions will be discussed and selected to implement. The group will decide what outside assistance is needed to make the R&P period more successful. Ms. Bilic stressed that regular meetings during the year will give her program a strategic framework to plan for improvements.
- As in each of the R&P Consultation Meetings, Ms. Bilic explained that she will review the demographics of the current refugee population and the demographics of those that are scheduled to arrive in the next year.
- Consultation members will learn the Country of Origin, languages spoken, educational background, family size and composition, medical conditions,
- As they are often asked they will not receive Syrians nor Central American minors.
- As it is important for those on this Refugee Task Force to understand their commitment to the Case Management Program Ms. Bilic proceeded to discuss the successes and challenges of the R&P period for refugee families. She explained 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.

- New clients receive basic orientation to life in the United States, laws and rules they need to be aware of, and several classes related to seeking employment and maintaining a job. This information needs much reinforcement as it is a new experience for all the Congolese refugees.
- Not all initial processes are mandatory but others are very helpful, such as: obtaining bus passes and practice riding the bus from their home to grocery stores, faith-based agencies, and other locations they may frequent. A trip to the Division of Motor Vehicles provides them with an official picture identification when proper identification is presented. Ms. Bilic often reviews these initial activities at Task Force meetings 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 especially with policies and procedures change.
- 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 laddering, and mentorship/internship, and further community outreach.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- The refugee clients that need assistance with their tax returns will be getting free help during the first week of February.
- It is encouraging to note that a few employers are allowing tutors to go to the workplace during lunch hours as they are anxious for their employees to better their English speaking skills.
- Immigrant and refugee students in elementary school will have an international unity day during school hours that is similar to the Olympic games. They are seeking a \$1100.00 food scholarship donation as Panera Bread Company offered to provide a \$5.00 to each student that attends. This will cover other drink and snack expenses as well.
- City Church of Tallahassee started a "Go Fund Me" page to collect donations to help pay for Parent Fees to the Child Care Provider.

## **EMPLOYMENT SERVICES**

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.

The Community Liaison, provider staff, and task force members continually advocate for other sources of employment during their on-going community activities. This message has to be on-going 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 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.

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. 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.

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. It was noted that while the Congolese students are learning English, there still is a deficit in their reading and writing skills.

### **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.

**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, 2018  
10:00 to Noon  
Adult and Community Education  
526 Appleyard Drive  
Tallahassee, FL 32305

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