



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

**Rick Scott**  
Governor

Rebecca Kapusta  
Interim Secretary

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**DATE:** December 17, 2018

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

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

**SUBJECT:** December 11<sup>th</sup> Meeting Minutes

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

**Date:** Tuesday, January 22nd, 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 and mutual assistance associations. An average of 50 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!*

## 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 represented the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Refugee Service Program. A total of 72 were present and after the annual luncheon, the meeting was called to order at 1:40pm.

### **Refugee Services Update**

- Janet Blair gave a report on Fiscal Year 2018 (FFY18) arrivals. There have been a total of 587 new arrivals in Hillsborough County and 196 arrivals in Pinellas County with 11 new arrivals in Pasco. This is an annual total of 794 arrivals for Tampa Bay. Last fiscal year there were a total of 3,124 arrivals in Tampa Bay. The top 5 populations included Cuban, Congolese, Egyptian, Haitian and Venezuelans. The Egyptian and Venezuelan arrivals are asylees who have been granted asylum in the past year. A total of 25 Venezuelans and 36 Egyptians received asylum in FFY18. Janet showed a map with the locations that asylees are living in. Most Venezuelans are in Tampa in the Carrollwood, Town & Country and New Tampa neighborhoods. The majority of Egyptian asylees are in Northern Pinellas and Pasco Counties. For FFY18 there were a total of 7,099 arrivals statewide. Last year there were a total of 33,279 arrivals in Florida.
- **Year in Review:** Janet Blair compiled a slide show of the accomplishments of the task force during 2018. In spite of funding cuts and staff reductions, the task force was extremely active and highlighted accomplishments include:
  - The First Annual Faith Community Summit held on with 58 clergy and congregational members from over 10 different faith communities in attendance.
  - Ongoing or newly established programs/services to refugees from the faith community sector include: 2 refugee women's sewing classes established-one on each side of the bay, an emergency housing/utility fund established, tutoring services for refugee youth at both a Christian church and a Muslim community organization, donation drives for school supplies and household items, the launch of "Radiant Kitchens" a refugee run catering program, an international festival and a thanksgiving celebration.
  - A successful World Refugee Day event under the leadership of Doug Haskitt held at Pinellas Technical College (PTC) with the Mayor of St. Petersburg speaking, a citizenship ceremony naturalizing 35 new citizens, and over 300 community members in attendance. One highlight was 3 refugees adult ESOL students receiving full scholarships to vocational training at PTC.
  - A refugee women's Summer Institute run by University of South Florida student volunteers which educated refugee women in the Arabic speaking community on being community leaders with knowledge of community resources to share within their community.
  - The Refugee & Migrant Women's Initiative (RAMWI) and the United Nations Tampa Bay Chapter's "Picture My Life" project year-long photo project culminating with refugee youth's photographs being displayed at a Tampa museum.
  - The Largo Library working with other community partners in Pinellas County to gather donated

- items for 160 Welcome Baskets which were distributed to refugee families. These baskets were filled with household, baby and school items that cannot be purchased with SNAP cards.
- A Welcoming Week event for over 200 attendees being held in Tampa and organized by WOKE community volunteers.
  - The second Oral History project entitled “American Stories” being launched with the USF Anthropology Dept. as well as an in-depth research project on diet and nutrition among Congolese refugees.
  - A successful Congolese focused ESOL class being launched by CARIBE on Saturday mornings.
  - The Congolese run Youth Education and Development Program gaining non-profit status and taking their refugee youth soccer team to play against other refugee youth teams in both Orlando and Jacksonville.
  - Launching of a technology based ESOL program for Arabic speaking women by a new nonprofit, Tampa Women Stars, Inc. This program offers YouTube based ESOL classes with follow-up through Whatsapp, a free phone based application that allows for texts, phone calls and video conferencing.
  - The first annual Interfaith Thanksgiving event for refugee families held in November with organizers from Christian, Muslim and Jewish faith communities. All food was donated by 7 top Tampa restaurants and over 250 attended this event entitled “Feels Like Home.”
  - Recognition of task force members who have won awards this year: Maria Hernandez from LSF who won the Mayor’s Hispanic Advisory Council Award, Emily Holbrook from USF who won the ACE Volunteer of the Year award and Radiant Hands who won recognition from both USF and from the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) for their work with refugee families.
  - Additional celebration of the contributions of both Jasna Spendl who has been a case manager working with refugees at LSF for over 23 years and Maxi Wood who has been the coordinator of Project Prosper for over 8 years and a dedicated task force member and is now leaving to pursue a music career.
  - Announcement that the task force members through their private donations have now funded a Project Prosper loan of \$1,500 to be given to a refugee applicant in 2019. Once the first applicant pays back the loan, it will be given to another refugee applicant and so it will continue to assist refugee families through the years.

## **Presentations:**

- The first presentation was from Coptic Orthodox Charities (COC) and the CARIBE program. COC received funding from the U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS) program to provide a citizenship program which includes free legal services for citizenship application and free language support for clients needing classes in both civics and English language instruction. This program serves both immigrants who have been permanent residents for at least 5 years (or 3 years when married to a U.S. citizen) and refugees who have been legal permanent residents for 5 years. There are currently 60 individuals enrolled in this program. The program is for those over age 18 and more information can be found at [www.copticcharities.org](http://www.copticcharities.org)
- The second presentation was given by Elaine MacArthur from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) which is a federal agency that administers and enforces civil rights laws against workplace discrimination. Elaine, who is an active member of the task force, wants to ensure that other

members are aware they they can reach out to her with any employment discrimination concerns as well as for proactive education around this issue. Often refugee employees are unaware of their rights and we as providers need to ensure that we have all of the correct information. For example, an employer can enforce an “English Only” rule that this is the only language to be spoken during business hours. However, the employer cannot require that employees speak only English during their breaks or lunch hour. Elaine is willing to meet with any providers interested in learning more about EEOC and can be reached at [ELAINE.MCARTHUR@EEOC.GOV](mailto:ELAINE.MCARTHUR@EEOC.GOV) to set up an appointment. More detailed information on EEOC in general can be found at <https://www.eeoc.gov/>

- The Mental Health Minute was presented by Stacy Kratz, PhD, on behalf of the mental health subcommittee. The focus of this presentation was combatting compassion fatigue through optimism.

## **General Updates**

- 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 DCF ACCESS program was represented by Kristi Miller who 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.
- CARIBE Adult Education program shared the new spring schedule for classes at 5 locations as well as their multiple community collaborations including setting up a family resource center at Chamberlin High School, offering a health literacy class, and launching workplace ESOL classes at a variety of business locations including the Cheesecake Factory. These new programs and services offered by CARIBE are due to diversification of funding.

## **Upcoming TF Meetings for 2019:**

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.

Dates for the quarterly meetings are:

**January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2019**

**April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

**August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

**December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019**