



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

**Rick Scott**  
Governor

**Mike Carroll**  
Secretary

---

**DATE:** December 21, 2017

**TO:** Members of the South West Florida Refugee Task Force

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

**SUBJECT:** December 13th, 2017 Meeting Minutes

---

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

**Date:** February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2018  
**Time:** 1:00-3:00pm  
**Location:** Florida Dept. of Health—Main  
Auditorium, 2200 Ringling  
Blvd., Sarasota, FL 34237

**Contact:** Janet Blair  
**Phone:** (813) 545-1716  
**Fax:** (813) 558-5598  
**E-Mail:** [Janet.Blair@myflfamilies.com](mailto:Janet.Blair@myflfamilies.com)  
[Taddese.Fessehay@myflfamilies.com](mailto:Taddese.Fessehay@myflfamilies.com)

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 fifteen people attends 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!*

SunCoast Region, 11351 Ulmerton Road, Largo, FL 33778

## SWFL REFUGEE TASK FORCE MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was held at the Lee County Public Education Center located at 2855 Colonial Blvd. in Fort Myers Florida. Janet Blair, Community Liaison, represented the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF). Twenty-eight people were in attendance and the meeting was called to order at 1:32pm.

### **PRESENTATIONS**

- The first presentation was given by Don Jarrell, the Community Relations Officer for District 10 of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Don provided updates on Temporary Protective Status ending for Haitians, Hondurans and Nicaraguans. More detailed information can be found at each of the following links.

<https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/temporary-protected-status/temporary-protected-status-designated-country-honduras>

<https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/temporary-protected-status/temporary-protected-status-designated-country-nicaragua>

<https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/temporary-protected-status/temporary-protected-status-designated-country-haiti>

Don also shared that USCIS has a backlog of Employment Authorization applications and renewals due to increased security checks and restructuring within the agency to meet new federal requirements. There is an approximate wait time of 6-7 months for Employment Authorization Documents at this time.

- The second presentation was from Barbara Dell, the founder and CEO of Dress for Success SW Florida. This program provides women with a variety of programs including the Suits for Success program that not only provides a professional outfit for a job interview but supplies a client with 20 additional items once she is employed. The agency also offers training on preparation for employment, assistance with job retention and an entrepreneurial program for women starting their own businesses. More information about this program and becoming a community partner can be found at <https://swflorida.dressforsuccess.org/>
- The final presentation was given by James Kushner, an attorney from Gulf Coast Legal Services' Manatee/Sarasota office who is an expert in housing rights. An overview of renter's rights was given with clarification of both the landlord and the tenant's responsibilities. More information can be found on the website at <http://gulfcoastlegal.org/legal-help/>

**REFUGEE SERVICES & COMMUNITY UPDATES**

- DCF's ACCESS program gave an update on the Food for Florida program that is now concluded and the resulting backlog in benefits applications that resulted from staff being relocated around the state to administer disaster food assistance. The refugee program has seen a serious drop in applications in the past six months but providers were reminded to make a note on new applications that the client is a refugee in the comments section, so that they are routed to experienced staff within the agency.
- Lutheran Services, Florida (LSF) gave an update on the Comprehensive Refugee Services program in SW Florida. Currently both the Naples & Fort Myers offices have over 1,000 active clients and the Sarasota office has over 700 active clients. All three offices are looking at creative outreach methods which include reaching out to previous clients via email and text, using Spanish media sources and building new community partnerships.
  - Task Force meetings for next year were discussed and all agreed that the format of meeting in Manatee/Sarasota twice a year and Lee/Collier twice a year was a good structure. The new meeting time from 1:00-3:00pm was also approved as it allows for easier travel afterwards between counties
- Next year's World Refugee Day event will be held at the USF campus in Sarasota with Jody McBrien as the community lead representative for the USF Diversity Council working with Jacquie Williams from LSF and Janet Blair. A planning meeting will be held in January.

**NEXT MEETING**      **February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2018 from 1:00-3:00pm**

**Contacts**      [Janet.Blair@myflfamilies.com](mailto:Janet.Blair@myflfamilies.com) or [Taddese.Fesseheye@myflfamilies.com](mailto:Taddese.Fesseheye@myflfamilies.com)