



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

**Rick Scott**  
Governor

**Mike Carroll**  
Secretary

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**DATE:** October 30, 2017  
**TO:** Members of the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force  
**FROM:** Janet Blair, Refugee Services (RS)  
**SUBJECT:** August 1, 2017 Meeting Minutes

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

**Date:** Tuesday, November 7, 2017  
**Time:** 1:30 P.M. – 3:30 P.M.  
**Location:** Department of Children & Families  
Ave, Tampa FL 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.***

This meeting was held at Lutheran Services Florida located at 3625 West Waters Ave in Tampa, FL. Janet Blair represented the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Refugee Service Program. A total of 74 were present and the meeting was called to order at 1:40pm.

### **Presentations:**

- A “Mental Health Minute” was offered by Grace Jean-Pierre, Victim Advocate at the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay and member of the mental health subcommittee. We now open each meeting with a short, informative presentation on mental health in order to educate our members and provide them with mental health resources for the clients they serve.
- Our first special presentation was given by Professor Roberta Baer on the newly published oral history project entitled “American Stories” and funded by the University of South Florida’s Center for Community Engagement. The goal of this project was to collect oral histories from an ethnically diverse group of refugees in Florida. These were then re-written at 4th grade reading level for use as supplementary reading materials in the local adult learning programs run by the refugee services Hillsborough adult education provider, CARIBE. Providers identified refugees and former refugees who were willing to be interviewed. Refugees were asked to tell a story from their lives that was taped. The transcription was given to them for their approval and/or any changes they wished to see in it. They chose the name to use, their own or a pseudonym. The stories were then re-written by the USF students at 4th grade reading level and made into booklets to be used in CARIBE English classes and by Hillsborough County Schools, grades K-12. This project is scheduled to be repeated in 2018 and booklets are on sale to fund the new project. To purchase a book, email Dr. Baer at [baer@usf.edu](mailto:baer@usf.edu)
- The second panel presentation provided an overview of Habitat for Humanity on each side of Tampa Bay. Habitat for Humanity provides home ownership opportunities for low income clients who go through the qualification process and agree to the program parameters. With volunteer labor and local donations of money and some in-kind materials, Habitat builds and rehabilitates houses with the help of the homeowner families. Habitat houses are sold to partner families or individuals at no profit and financed with zero-interest loans. More information can be found on agency websites at: Pinellas Affiliate: <https://habitatpinellas.org/> Hillsborough Affiliate: <http://www.habitathillsborough.org/>
- The final special presentation was given by Paul Soost from Step Up for Students as a reminder of the benefits the program holds for students K-12. Step Up for Students is a nonprofit scholarship funding organization that helps administer two scholarships for Florida schoolchildren: the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program (FTC) for low-income families and the Gardiner Scholarship (PLSA) for children

with certain special needs. Refugee families can be referred to apply for either program and the scholarships can be used for private school tuition.

More information can be found at <https://www.stepupforstudents.org/>

## **Refugee Services Update**

- Recognition: Janet presented a certificate of recognition from the Task Force to Doug Haskitt, manager of the Pinellas Refugee Education Program (PREP), the refugee services funded adult education program with Pinellas County Schools, in recognition of his leadership on World Refugee Day 2017. The PREP program is housed in Pinellas Technical College which hosted the World Refugee Day event for the second consecutive year. This year's World Refugee Day event was a tremendous success with approximately 240 in attendance, and "Making a World of Difference" awards given to former refugees and immigrants who are giving back to the community. The event also included a citizenship ceremony with USCIS and was hosted by Bay News 9 anchor, Al Rochelle.
- There was some discussion concerning the recent funding cuts for refugee services. Janet shared that Refugee Services does anticipate a reduction of 40-50% in funding for the upcoming year. In light of these federal cuts, Refugee Services has no option other than to re-evaluate contracts for FFY2018 and beyond. Funded program directors are already in conversation with their contract managers about what this will look like moving forward. On a local level, we can work to build capacity through new and existing partnerships in the community. These collaborations are now more important than ever before.

## **General Updates**

- **Welcoming Week Event**  
Elizabeth Dunn from USF gave an overview of this year's local commemoration of National Welcoming Week. The event will be held on Saturday, September 23<sup>rd</sup> from 11:00am to 2:00pm at the University Area Community Development Center in Tampa. This event will be informal with interactive games and activities and food. There will be no formal program as the goal will be to foster genuine interaction between American born and foreign born participants. This year's sponsors include the Honors College at USF, UN-USA Tampa Bay Chapter, Radiant Hands and the Language Line.
- **Picture My Life-Tampa Bay UN-USA and Refugee & Migrant Women's Initiative (RAMWI) Project**  
Florence Ackey, founder of RAMWI and Robert Kruithoff from the UN-USA gave an update on the refugee youth photo project. Classes were held all summer for 13 refugee youth. Each class focused not only on learning photography, but also on dealing with emotions such as grief and learning positive coping skills. At the conclusion of the classes, each student will receive a donated digital camera and their work will be exhibited at the Welcoming Week event this fall and also in a special exhibition in 2018.

## **Upcoming TF Meeting**

- **November 7<sup>th</sup> at 1:30pm**, Department of Children & Families, 9393 North Florida Ave, Tampa, FL