



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

**Rick Scott**  
Governor

**Mike Carroll**  
Secretary

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**DATE:** April 27, 2017  
**TO:** Members of the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force  
**FROM:** Janet Blair, Refugee Services (RS)  
**SUBJECT:** February 7, 2016 Meeting Minutes

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

**Date:** Tuesday, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2017  
**Time:** 1:30 P.M. – 3:30 P.M.  
**Location:** Istanbul Cultural Center  
2166 West Busch Blvd, Tampa FL 33612  
**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.***

This meeting was held at Hyde Park United Methodist Church located at 500 W Platt St, Tampa, FL 33606. Janet Blair, George Lewis, Holly Merrick and Peggy Cadaeux represented the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Refugee Service Program. A total of 64 were present during this meeting and it was called to order at 1:37pm.

### **Presentations:**

- A presentation was given by Gulf Coast Jewish Family and Community Services (GCJFCSS) on their new Youth Pathways program being funded by DCF. This new program is available for youth ages 16-19 and offers support for both academic and career pathways. The youth program partners with refugee services' adult education and employment programs. Youth Pathways is now accepting referrals from both sides of the bay, but the office is located in Hillsborough County. Contact Information: 813-442-9306, email: [refugeeyouth@gcjfcs.org](mailto:refugeeyouth@gcjfcs.org)
- The second presentation was given by Project Prosper, a local nonprofit organization that helps refugees and immigrants to navigate the financial system through financial literacy classes. The program also provides a No Interest Loan Program for \$1,500 which helps new arrivals to establish credit. These loans can be utilized for citizenship costs, computers, cars or any other financial need by refugees and immigrants who have been in the country less than 10 years and have been employed for at least 6 months. The program matches all loan recipients with a financial mentor and has a financial incentive to pay back the loan in full in a timely manner. This program office is located in Pinellas County but serves both sides of the bay. For more information, contact Maxi Wood at [mwood@projectprosper.org](mailto:mwood@projectprosper.org) or (727) 266-0816.
- The final presentation was given by Refugee and Migrant Women's Initiative (RAMWI) which is a volunteer run program with the goal of enhancing the lives of refugee women through socio-economic, educational, health and cultural activities. This group meets on a monthly basis and holds workshops on topics selected by the women who participate. Each month a craft is also done to promote social bonding and to offer ideas for craft based businesses that can be done from home. For more information, contact Florence Ackey, founder and director of RAMWI at [rmwitampa@gmail.com](mailto:rmwitampa@gmail.com)

### **Refugee Services Update**

- Janet shared that the key outcome of the small group discussions held at the December 2016 Task Force meeting, was a desire to see more efforts focused on educational issues. The refugee populations arriving have serious gaps in education and there is a need at the K-12 level to partner with schools to address those needs as well as in adult education to ensure that refugees arriving with no literacy skills are receiving services.
- As a response to this identified need, several steps have already been taken. First, a Task Force educational subcommittee has been formed and includes representatives from Hillsborough County

Schools K-12 and Adult Education as well as university and community volunteers. This committee will meet regularly to coordinate local projects.

- Currently there is an afterschool program being held by both the PEER nonprofit organization's volunteers at the University Area Community Development Center and by Pastor Joseph Germain at Global Community Church. Both of these programs are in Tampa and serving K-12 students.
- In addition, Janet Blair and Alen Janjus have spearheaded a partnership with Pinellas County Schools Office of Strategic Partnerships to match community volunteer tutors/mentors with newly arriving refugee kids in grades K-12. To date, three training sessions have been held for 40 community volunteers on working with refugee children & youth. A total of 33 of those volunteers were registered & screened to become PCS weekly volunteer tutors/mentors. This is a pilot project and, as the first in the state, we hope to learn from the collaboration in order to refine and expand it throughout the district for the fall of 2017. We also hope to launch a similar partnership with Hillsborough County Public Schools.
- Finally, two schools in Tampa (Hunter's Green Elementary and Robles Elementary) have requested training for their staff on working with refugee students. Janet has worked with Lesleigh Lopez to provide these trainings and additional resources for teachers at both locations.

## **General Updates**

- **World Refugee Day**

Doug Haskitt from the PREP Adult Education program is chairing this year's event in partnership with USCIS (United States Citizenship & Immigration Services). Doug gave an update at the meeting and announced that this year's event will be held on June 16<sup>th</sup> from 1:00-3:30pm at Pinellas Technical College located at 901 34th St. South, in St. Petersburg, FL. The event will feature a networking time beforehand with jazz music and heavy hors d'oeuvres, a half hour program where the mayor will speak and awards will be given to former refugees who have made contributions to the community and a full citizenship ceremony, naturalizing former refugees. The event is free and open to the public.

- **Hyde Park United Methodist Church**

A special thank you was given to this congregation for donating a new computer to a Tampa refugee who is a leader in the Congolese community. In addition to this generous donation, this church has also collected a fund of \$7,000 to assist refugee families in need of assistance with rental and utility bills. They are coordinating these efforts through the Integration Assistance program at LSF.

- **Child Care Services**

An overview of the Hillsborough County Schools childcare program, funded by DCF, was given and materials were distributed. There is currently no wait list in Hillsborough County for services. It was stressed that newly arriving clients are given a maximum of one year of child care assistance during their job search and/or employment. Referrals are made by the Employment program and the four local resettlement agencies.

## **Upcoming TF Meeting**

- **May 2nd at 1:30pm**, Istanbul Cultural Center of Tampa Bay  
2166 W Busch Blvd, Tampa, FL 33612