



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

Rick Scott
Governor

Mike Carroll
Secretary

DATE: November 16, 2017
TO: Members of the South West Florida Refugee Task Force
FROM: Janet Blair, Refugee Services (RS)
SUBJECT: October 25, 2017 Meeting Minutes

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR:

Date: December 13, 2017
Time: 1:30-3:30pm
Location: Lee County Public Education
Ctr, Room 1024, 2855
Colonial Blvd. Fort Myers, FL

Contact: Janet Blair
Phone: (813) 545-1716
Fax: (813) 558-5598
E-Mail: Janet.Blair@myflfamilies.com
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 Sarasota Health Department located at 2200 Ringling Blvd, Sarasota, 34237. Janet Blair, Community Liaison, represented the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF). Twenty people were in attendance and the meeting was called to order at 1:35pm.

PRESENTATIONS

- The first presentation was given by Lutheran Services Florida's program manager in Sarasota, Ivis Traina. Ivis gave an overview of the comprehensive refugee services program covering SWFL with a specific emphasis on the program in Manatee/Sarasota. This program has not yet seen a slowdown in client services as clients are still relocating from Miami and other states. There are currently 700 active cases. Refugee clients live in three key areas: Bradenton is where most Cuban arrivals settle, since housing costs are lower; Palmetto has a large community of Haitian clients; and North Port has a significant Ukrainian community.
- The second presentation was from DCF Community Partner Liaison, Mike Day. Information on existing community partners, how to become a community partner and benefits of partnership were shared with task force members. Information about DCF Community Partnerships can be found on the website at: <http://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/access-florida-food-medical-assistance-cash/community-partner-network>
- Another presentation was given by Elizabeth Alvarado Linares from the nonprofit agency, Capital Good Fund. Capital Good Fund, is national organization providing affordable loans with an emphasis on serving refugees and immigrants. Last year an office was opened in Florida and applications are now accepted state-wide. Loans provided range from small emergency cash loans for up to \$500, to immigration loans for citizenship fees, green card costs or family reunification up to \$20,000. The agency also provides low interest car loans. The goal of the organization is to provide equitable loans and provide a pathway out of poverty. More information can be found on their website at <https://capitalgoodfund.org/en/>
- The final presentation was given by Elida Mujic, the Client Relations Coordinator for DCF's ACCESS program. Elida shared information on the Disaster SNAP program which has helped more than 7.5 million Floridians recover from Hurricane Irma. Due to setting up D-SNAP centers all over the state, ACCESS staff has been spread thin and there are delays in processing applications. However, ACCESS hours have been extended from 7:00am to 6:00pm to assist with this overflow. Elida also shared important Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) information and resources. Clients can locate a center near them online at <https://fema.gov/disaster-recovery-centers>

REFUGEE SERVICES & COMMUNITY UPDATES

- Church of Latter Day Saints volunteer and coordinator Julie Crowder was recognized for her outstanding oversight of volunteer efforts to assist refugee families and service providers following Hurricane Irma.
- Resources for Puerto Rican arrivals were disseminated by Janet Blair. These arrivals are U.S. citizens and are able to immediately apply for cash, food and medical assistance through DCF. FEMA is also providing housing vouchers and other assistance for this population.
- There was some discussion of the format for task force meetings and all agreed that holding meetings in the Sarasota/Manatee area and the Lee/Collier area would be a good plan for 2018. Janet will generate possible dates and locations and send them for approval.
- 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

December 13th, 2017 from 1:30-3:30pm
Lee County Public Education Ctr, Room 1024,
2855 Colonial Blvd. Fort Myers FL

Contacts

Janet.Blair@myflfamilies.com or Taddese.Fesseheye@myflfamilies.com