



State of Florida
Department of Children and Families

Rick Scott
Governor

Mike Carrol
Secretary

MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 13, 2017
TO: Members of the Tallahassee Refugee Task Force
FROM: Theresa Leslie, Refugee Services (RS)
SUBJECT: Meeting Minutes June 2017 substituted for WRD June 27, 2017

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR:

Date: September 12, 2017
Time: 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM
Location: International Rescue Committee
124 Marriott
Tallahassee, Florida 32301
Contact: Theresa Leslie
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This task force has been active in the Tallahassee area in the past few years. The participants are representatives of various government agencies, private not-for-profit organizations and volunteer groups. An average of about twenty to twenty-five 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 meeting!

2383 Phillips Rd. Tallahassee, FL 32308

TALLAHASSEE AREA REFUGEE TASK FORCE MEETING

The World Refugee Celebration has traditionally been substituted for the June Refugee Task Force Meeting. This year the June 13, 2017 Task Force Meeting will be held at the World Refugee Day event on June 27, 2017. This day was chosen by the community and the most available date for local refugees to attend.

SUMMARY OF EVENT

World Refugee Day – Tallahassee, FL
Northwest Region June 27, 2017

The 8th annual World Refugee Day event was held in Tallahassee, FL, the Northwest Region on Tuesday, June 27, 2017 at the Freedom Church with approximately 80 people in attendance. The participants included mostly Congolese and Syrian refugees and community partners were happy to see so many children.

Mayor of Tallahassee: The first portion of the event were a series of speakers who welcomed the refugees and pledged their continued support. Then Mayor of Tallahassee, Andrew Gillum was included in a large group picture with the children and their parents including staff of International Rescue Committee. The Mayor expressed his commitment to support the refugee resettlement and said he was proud that the refugees are now calling Tallahassee their new home. He offered that all city services and programs also will do what they can to help them.

Patti Grogan, Director of Refugee Services and Una Bilic, Site Manager for International Rescue Committee (IRC) also expressed the support of their programs to the successful resettlement of the refugees. They explained the challenges of this new environment but emphasized that there is a community who welcomes them to Tallahassee and will be there for them.

The Vice President of the Islamic Center of Tallahassee, Ahmed Rashidi spoke to the audience about the crisis around the world with the huge number of displaced refugees waiting to return to their home country or to a new country where they will not be persecuted. He emphasized the strong commitment of those at the Center to help the local refugees, including the Syrians that live very close to the Center. He emphasized that their commitment is offered 24/7 and will continue to help with English skills and getting employment. The Islamic Center places high importance on family and group gatherings in order to strengthen relationships and keep the families spirits in a positive direction. During the luncheon it was clear how well respected and loved Mr. Rashidi is to the refugees.

The next portion of the program was devoted to 2 individuals who both used their skills and giving heart both as volunteers and then tutors to help refugee children and parents learn English and bond with others so as to create new friendships.

First, **Kim Thacker from the Church of Latter Day Saints**, a wife, mother, journalist, and most importantly a strong advocate of giving and loving those in need has worked tirelessly to ensure the local refugees feel they have a community behind them in every way. She has organized tutors to help the students in school, created tutor supply bags for each school, mentor's families, secured 30 backpacks with supplies for the next school year, but most importantly she has recruited other members of her church to join her in these efforts.

She mentioned that she herself was a refugee and sincerely understands how hard it is on families. She has her entire family involved in her efforts to create a sharing atmosphere and making friends with the refugee population even while they know only little English. She said it is not hard to communicate even when you don't know the refugee's language. Her family was a huge supporter of this event in all aspects while also getting donations for her fellow church members. The families and children greeted her with open arms.

Second, **Molly Conrad, a graduate student at Florida State University** started to tutor a refugee student as an individual but soon realized the news of her tutoring efforts spread around campus quickly. She received many offers from students asking if they could help. In her presentation she explained how she willingly took on the role to organize the volunteer tutors to help local students. This effort blossomed into a large group of students volunteering to meet their individual students 3 days a week for a class period.

Molly and the group of volunteer/tutors also organized Pot Luck dinners and park outings for the families to create some fun times between the tutors and their students/parents. This all lead the tutors to conduct clothing and toy drives for the families. Molly concluded her presentation by saying the added benefit to the tutoring is that the refugee students made real attachments to their individual students and these relationships will be lasting.

The event ended with the traditional pot lunch luncheon with the refugees, community partners, and staff socializing and strengthening their on-going and newly established relationships.

Theresa Leslie
Community Liaison
DCF NW Region

The next Refugee Task Force Meeting is scheduled for September 12, 2017. See details on page 1.

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