



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

**Rick Scott**  
Governor

**Mike Carroll**  
Secretary

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**DATE:** November 16, 2017  
**TO:** Members of the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force  
**FROM:** Janet Blair, Refugee Services (RS)  
**SUBJECT:** November 7th Meeting Minutes

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

**Date:** Tuesday, January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2018  
**Time:** 1:30 P.M. – 3:30 P.M.  
**Location:** Pinellas Technical College Bldg 1  
6100 154th Ave N, Clearwater, FL  
**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 the Department of Children & Families located at 9393 North Florida Ave in Tampa, FL Janet Blair represented the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Refugee Service Program. A total of 61 were present and the meeting was called to order at 1:35pm.

### **Presentations:**

- A “Mental Health Minute” was offered by Jackie Siven, Ph.D. candidate at the University of South Florida 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 Blaire Jackson, Community Liaison with Chrysalis Health. Chrysalis Health is a Medicaid receiving agency serving individuals from ages 3 & up with community based mental health, sexual trauma and substance abuse treatment. Chrysalis matches all referrals with a therapist within 72 hours of referral and treatment is available in-home or in the community, depending on client needs. Chrysalis will work with Medicaid approved interpreters or with refugee services interpreters if the client agrees. Appointments are available days, evenings and weekends. The mental health subcommittee has met with Chrysalis management and offered training on working with refugee clients. More information can be found on their website at <http://www.chrysalishealth.com/>
- The second panel presentation provided an overview of recent training in Orlando, Best Practices in Recruiting and Utilizing Volunteers, offered by World Relief Jacksonville staff. Representatives from Lutheran Services Florida, Catholic Charities and Gulf Coast Jewish Family & Community Services shared the workshop information with task force members. All who attended found this to be a helpful model, particularly at a time when staff and funding are being cut from programs. Concerns/barriers discussed included the need for a full time, professional staff member to oversee an extensive volunteer program and awareness of the fact that volunteers cannot replace the work being done by professionals & paraprofessionals.

### **Refugee Services Update**

- Recognition: Janet presented certificates of recognition to the key members of the Welcoming Week planning subcommittee who worked hard to make this year’s Welcoming Week a success. It takes a great deal of planning beforehand and hard work on the day of an event held for hundreds of people. We could not make this annual event a success without dedicated task force members who go above and beyond their job responsibilities to make it happen.
- As this was the final meeting of 2017, we once again discussed the challenges faced and the accomplishments achieved this year. Challenges listed included: funding cuts at the federal level resulting in programmatic/staff cuts locally; lower arrival numbers—particularly in the last quarter

in Tampa Bay, where we only saw a total of 53 new arrivals coming through the formal resettlement process; and an increase in rental costs and scarcity of affordable housing in Tampa. Even with these daunting challenges, this task force managed to make some major accomplishments this year including the following:

- 1. Sustaining existing partnerships & building new ones:** Our partnerships have never been stronger with faith communities across the bay. There are ongoing partners who have walked beside us and our clients for years now such as Pastor Joe who leads a Christian congregation at Refuge Church and Radiant Hands, a nonprofit funded by the Muslim community. And this year we gained new partners—the Church of Latter Day Saints has many of their stakes involved in helping on a variety of projects and donated over \$1,000 of canned food to refugee families as well as countless backpacks & school supplies, bikes and household items. Hyde Park United Methodist Church has a generous member who single handedly funded and set up a computer center at Pastor Joe's afterschool and summer program for refugee youth. Hyde Park United Methodist also established an emergency housing fund of \$7,000 which assisted many families with one-time rent & utility bills. And Palma Ceia Presbyterian Church led the way with the local Presbytery of 90 churches to allocate \$50,000 in emergency housing/utility relief for refugee families who qualify. Palma Ceia Presbyterian also hosted a book drive for the summer children's program, and collected gift cards for newly arrived refugee youth who needed clothing & hygiene items. We've never seen as much support or generosity as we have this year!
- 2. Capacity building within existing community organizations:** One example of this is providing training for existing tutors and mentors within Pinellas County and Hillsborough County Schools to ensure that we are reaching refugee children of all ages who need support and assistance. This project has taken off with Pinellas County Schools and peer mentors have also been recruited & trained as well as refugee parents being brought in as volunteers. Janet Blair presented at a Pinellas County Schools conference on 11/10/17 about this partnership and hopes to see it launch in Hillsborough County as well. In addition to capacity building within the schools, the task force mental health subcommittee has built a reciprocal relationship with the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay which has included us offering ongoing training and consultation on working with refugee clients while they offered task force members training on trauma informed care. These are just two highlights of the many capacity building relationships developed in the past year.
- 3. Our annual community events:** With a zero budget, this task force still manages to hold two highly successful annual events. The first is World Refugee Day which is held in June in partnership with Pinellas County Schools and USCIS. Over 200 attended this year's World Refugee Day event and we focused on the contributions that refugees and immigrants make to our community by giving out "Making a World of Difference" awards to those who are giving back to the community. Our Welcoming Week event was held on September 23rd, despite Hurricane Irma. This year's event was also a tremendous success with over 300 in attendance & multiple community partners. Welcomer Awards were given out to 7 individuals and organizations who went above and beyond this year to contribute time and resources to the refugee community. We also had a professional portrait station where each refugee family could get their photo taken and go home with a printed & framed family portrait.
- 4. Sustained community engagement & new collaborations with USF:** What this included for the past year was a campus-wide Warm Welcome Clothing Drive which provided 155 refugee kids and youth with jackets, sweaters and gift cards; an oral history compilation written by Anthropology students & faculty that uses stories told by local refugees and former refugees

about their experiences to create a text for use in ESOL classes at the adult and secondary level; student volunteers doing afterschool tutoring & starting after school soccer teams for refugee youth; a group of graduate students in the college of public health creating a transportation guide for refugees speaking Swahili along with countless other initiatives.

- **For 2018, this task force wants to focus on the following:** setting up a speaker's bureau to do presentations in the community, (including a volunteer training) and holding a faith community summit to bring together congregations who are working with refugees and those who want to do this work so that they can learn from each other and we can provide some training on existing programs/resources.

## **General Updates**

- **Caribe Adult Education Program:** Enrollment is at an all-time high with 1,000 students currently attending classes. The program manager gave a presentation on recent innovative initiatives including partnering with Lutheran Services to set up classes on site—there are now day and evening classes offered at this site with 500 students enrolled to attend. In addition, Caribe launched a partnership with hotels in the Brandon area and now has 24 refugee students attending ESOL classes at one of the hotel sites learning vocational English. The hotels pay for these classes which benefit their business and are also offered to non-refugee students. In addition, Caribe students and teachers were recognized this year with two state-wide awards.
- **Picture My Life-Tampa Bay UN-USA and Refugee & Migrant Women's Initiative (RAMWI) Project** Photos taken by refugee youth during the summer photography course were on display at the Welcoming Week event in September. A short video about the project was also shown and can be seen here: <https://vimeo.com/234982011> A larger exhibit of photos is planned for late January/early February in Tampa.

## **Upcoming TF Meeting**

- **January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2018 at 1:30pm**, Pinellas Technical College Bldg 1, 6100 154th Ave N, Clearwater, FL