



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

Rick Scott
Governor

Mike Carroll
Secretary

DATE: May 11, 2017
TO: Members of the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force
FROM: Janet Blair, Refugee Services (RS)
SUBJECT: May 2, 2017 Meeting Minutes

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR:

Date: Tuesday, August 1, 2017
Time: 1:30 P.M. – 3:30 P.M.
Location: Lutheran Services, Florida
3625 West Waters Ave, Tampa FL
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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 Istanbul Cultural Center located at 2166 West Busch Blvd in Tampa, FL. Janet Blair represented the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Refugee Service Program. A total of 57 were present during this meeting and it was called to order at 1:35pm.

Presentations:

- A “Mental Health Minute” was offered by Stacy Kratz, LCSW and Co-Chair of the Task Force Mental Health Subcommittee. We will 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.
- A presentation was given by Gulf Coast Jewish Family and Community Services (GCJFCS) on their new Refugee Speaker’s Bureau by AmeriCorps Member, Chelsea Mandrigues. The goal of the Refugee Speaker’s Bureau is to provide a positive platform for individuals with refugee status to be empowered as they learn to publicly speak about their experience and to educate & engage the community. Chelsea gave tips for other organizations seeking to set up a similar refugee speaker’s bureau and stressed the importance of providing the speakers with individualized and ongoing feedback. GCJFCS is willing to be a resource for other organizations interested in starting a similar program.
- The second panel presentation provided an overview on the various cultural groups within the recently resettled refugee community from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The panel consisted of University of South Florida (USF) Professor Dillon Mahoney, and two refugees from the DRC—Angie Uwimana and Sadiki Bertin. The presenters stressed the importance of not grouping all arrivals from the DRC under the label of “Congolese” as they often do not think of or refer to themselves using this term and it was suggested that we speak of them as “victims of the Congo wars” or as refugees from the DRC. There are over 450 different languages spoken in the DRC and among those being resettled, there are a variety of ethno-linguistic communities. Locally, the largest cultural group resettled is the Bembe and they have now organized a Council of Elders which oversees all decisions for the group. This Council consists of five members, three of whom are refugees and two who are U.S. citizens originally from the DRC. A women’s council and youth council are also being formed. It is important for providers to be aware of these organizational structures as we work with arrivals from the DRC. Discussion was held about the lack of enrollment in ESOL classes by those from the DRC since they began arriving in larger numbers in 2016. The refugee services adult education program is working to address this issue by starting a new class with classroom aides who are themselves from the DRC.

Refugee Services Update

- Recognition: Janet presented a certificate of recognition from the University of South Florida’s College of Public Health to task force member Florence Ackey for her nomination for Woman of the Year. Although Florence was not selected for the final award, the committee was extremely impressed with

her work at the Department of Health, Refugee Clinic and in building the refugee women's group as a volunteer.

- **Task Force Speaker's Bureau:** There was discussion about starting a speaker's bureau for the task force with key members being recruited internally to be a part of it. This speaker's bureau would serve as a subcommittee of the task force and might include refugee, former refugee and non-refugee speakers. The goal would be to provide those on the speaker's bureau with concrete talking points for presentations in the community so that a consistent message is being delivered.

General Updates

- **World Refugee Day**

Doug Haskitt from the PREP Refugee 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 16th 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, a cultural dance performance and a full citizenship ceremony, naturalizing over 30 former refugees. The event is free and open to the public.

- **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 23rd 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. The planning committee is meeting May 12th and still open to new members joining. Please contact Janet for more information.

- **Picture My Life-Tampa Bay UN-USA and Refugee & Migrant Women's Initiative Project**

Carolyn Morales from the UN-USA group shared about an upcoming collaborative project for refugee youth. In June, a photographic mentoring program concluding with an exhibition will be launched with refugee youth in Tampa. Selected RAMWI families with middle and high school youth are participating and The Tampa Bay UN-USA is recruiting sponsors/funding for digital cameras to be used during the project and then donated to the refugee youth who participate. Refugee youth will learn photography skills from local professionals in weekly classes during the summer with an exhibition and fundraising event to benefit RAMWI at the conclusion of the project.

Upcoming TF Meeting

- **August 1st at 1:30pm**, Lutheran Services, Florida Inc., 3625 West Waters Ave, Tampa, FL