



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

Rick Scott
Governor

Esther Jacobo
Interim Secretary

DATE: December 9, 2013
TO: Members of the Collier Refugee Task Force
FROM: Janet Blair, Refugee Services (RS)
SUBJECT: October 9, 2013 Meeting Minutes

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR:

Date: December 11, 2013
Time: 10:00 A.M. – 12:00 Noon
Location: Lorenzo Walker
Institute of Technology
3702 Estey Ave
Naples, FL 34104
Contact: Janet Blair
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This task force has been active in the Collier area for many years. The participants are representatives of various government agencies, private not-for-profit organizations and mutual assistance associations. An Average of twenty 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!

Refugee Services Program
9393 North Florida Ave, Tampa FL 33612

Mission: Protect the Vulnerable, Promote Strong and Economically Self-Sufficient Families, and Advance Personal and Family Recovery and Resiliency

COLLIER REFUGEE TASK FORCE MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was held at Lee County Health Department, 83 Pondella Road North, Ft. Myers, FL 33903 and facilitated by Janet Blair, Community Liaison for Refugee Services at the Florida Department of Children and Families. A total of 33 members were present and the meeting was called to order at 10:10am.

PRESENTATIONS FROM COMMUNITY PARTNERS:

Bob Sorensen, Literacy Council of Gulf Coast

There are a significant number of refugees needing ESOL in Lee County– especially after the state starting charging for ESOL so newly arriving refugee families are being referred to the Literacy Council. The Council is a non-profit program, under the United Way umbrella which allows them to partner with agencies like the Salvation Army. They currently receive no government funding. The Council has been in operation for 25 years and is now the second largest in the country. Currently there are 3500 students enrolled but no system in place to track refugee students. The Council provides mostly group classes as the community aspect of a class is beneficial and they find they can provide higher quality tutoring in a class setting. All classes are on-going and free of charge.

Lynne Thorp, Health Navigation Program

This program covers a 10 county area. Information is being given out in English, Spanish and Creole. There are a total of 17 navigators for this entire area and the website is flooded with requests for information. There have been challenges in rolling out this information but all should soon be resolved. They are open to doing presentations for providers and handed out contact information.

Bertha Cassidy & Don Jarrell– United States Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS)

Gave a brief overview of programs and services in Lee and Collier counties. Talked about the newest immigration scam of people calling and saying they are immigration officer and need personal information including social security numbers and alien numbers due to problems with their records. Clients need to know that immigration officers do NOT call, they always send a letter. Clients and staff should report to any fraudulent calls. The same applies to “notarios” who pose as immigration lawyers and officials. Clients need to know they can only rely on accredited Immigration Attorneys and BIA representatives. USCIS now has an office in Ft Myers as well.

PROGRAM INFORMATION & UPDATE

Resettlement Program: There have been a total of 87 Reception & Placement clients this year to date and the Matching Grant program is full. At this time, approximately half of all clients being resettled are locating in Lee County and the other half in Collier County.

Health Department: Due to new statewide regulations as of Oct 1, 2013, all newly arriving refugees must be seen within 90 days. All appointments do not have to be completed but the initial visit does. The Lee County Health Department is looking for more collaboration with Catholic Charities, a meeting will be arranged.

Adult Education: (Project STRIVE): Reported they are receiving a lot of new clients. This year there are more Haitians with new documents but no I-94. Unfortunately they do not qualify for the program. There are 153 registered students, 10 of which are now taking advanced classes in the auto mechanics and dental assistants programs. In addition, fifteen students are enrolled in distance learning.

Employment: (REAP): The employment program has successfully launched a short-term training program in housekeeping with Doubletree Hotel. Three students have now completed the course and two have started working in the field. There are currently seven individuals enrolled in the Career Laddering program which is now active after being dormant for three years. The Ft Myers office continues to be busy.

Employability Status Assistance/Legal: Both the Fort Myers and Naples offices continue to be very busy with a total of 2033 clients this year to date.

Youth Program: Reported they are extremely busy and officially started a waiting list. Collier County Schools has lowered the graduation age to 19 – not 21 anymore – so this is a challenge for refugees coming as high school students who have a shorter time to complete all required high school credits. There are a total of 105 students served to date and the program has met all contract performance expectations.

ACCESS Program: There is currently an issue with no social security cards being created due to the federal government shut down. Currently DCF is accepting paper applications for social security cards as proof a new arrival has applied.

South West Florida Works: There are changes in the system which is now fully automated. SWFW is closely working with ACCESS to ensure a smooth transition to this new system. All offices now have bilingual staff, except for Port Charlotte.

NEXT MEETING:

Date: Wednesday December 11, 2013 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM
Location: Lorenzo Walker Institute, 3702 Estey Ave, Naples, FL 34104
Contact: Janet_Blair@dcf.state.fl.us or (813) 545-1716