



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

**Ron DeSantis**  
Governor

**Shevaun Harris**  
Secretary

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**DATE:** May 10, 2022

**TO:** Members of the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force

**FROM:** Janet Blair, Refugee Services (RS)

**SUBJECT:** February 22, 2022, Meeting Minutes

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

**Date:** May 17, 2022  
**Time:** 1:30 P.M. – 3:30 P.M.  
**Location:** Microsoft Teams

**Contact:** Janet Blair  
**Phone:** (813) 545-1716  
**Fax:** (727) 588-7063  
**E-Mail:** [Janet.Blair@myflfamilies.com](mailto:Janet.Blair@myflfamilies.com) \_  
[David.Draper@myflfamilies.com](mailto:David.Draper@myflfamilies.com)

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, academic institutions and faith community representatives. An average of 70 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 and needs, facilitate strong communication among refugee services and community providers, get informed about upcoming community events, 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.***

The meeting was held on Microsoft Teams and Janet Blair and David Draper represented the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Refugee Service Program. A total of **97** individuals were present and the meeting was called to order at 1:34pm.

- The **Mental Health Minute** was given by Florence Ackey, MSW, a clinician who works at the Dept of Health and also chairs the Mental Health Committee.

### Presentations

- **Special Recognition:** Dr. Vicky Phares and the USF Psychology Dept and the Economic Self Sufficiency Program (ESS) of Dept of Children and Families.  
Dr. Vicky Phares has championed refugee causes on the USF campus for almost 20 years. For 19 years, Dr. Phares has held an annual Warm Welcome Donation Drive that brings a happier holiday season to the neediest of refugee families. This year, Dr. Phares led two donation drives. The first was the Warm Welcome which raised over \$2,000 for clothing, toys and gift cards for a group of Congolese refugee families in need. The second donation drive was conducted with the Undergrad Psychology Alumni Association and raised over \$1,000 in donations of complete kitchen sets & hygiene bags for newly arriving Afghans. A special thank you to Dr Phares for her ongoing commitment and leadership benefiting refugees for almost 2 decades!

Our ESS program here in the Suncoast Region has been working harder than ever over the past few years. In spite of staffing shortages and record applications, under the leadership of Matthew Johnson, Operations Management Consultant 1 and Denise Garbin, Program Administrator, we've been able to work together to address the backlog of refugee applications for food assistance. We are not completely finished but much progress has been made under the leadership of these two exemplary staff.

- Presentation from **Language Line by Joe Matthews**, Strategic Account Executive for Language Line Solutions. This agency is the contracted interpreter provider for all refugee services programs. Currently the need is at an all-time high for interpreters speaking Dari and Pashtu and recruiting is ongoing. Wait times will be a bit longer for these two languages but with more interpreters being hired and trained, they expect wait times to go down in the near future. For more information on this program go to <https://www.languageline.com/s/>
- The final presentation was given by Dr Adam Silverman, who currently serves as technical lead, senior subject matter expert, and national security consultant with Helios Global, Inc and specializes in cultural considerations for strategy, policy, and operations. Dr Silverman gave a presentation on Cultural Considerations Regarding Afghan Refugees & Resettlement. For more information on his work or to invite him to speak go to [https://www.linkedin.com/in/adam-l-silverman-45244b70?original\\_referer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F](https://www.linkedin.com/in/adam-l-silverman-45244b70?original_referer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F)

**Provider & Community Partner Updates:**

- The **USF College of Medicine's Refugee Clinic** continues to offer free preventative, primary and urgent care to refugees and asylum seekers who are uninsured. Clinics will be held on Feb 23, March 23, April 27<sup>th</sup> and May 25<sup>th</sup>.
- Due to the large number of arrivals, **The Refugee Clinic in Tampa** is now booking appointments for screenings in April, May, and June. The Refugee Clinic in **Pinellas** is also booking into mid-April.
- **Project Prosper** shared the exciting news that their loans have now increased to a \$2500 maximum for all who are newly arrived to the country within the past 15 years. Payments for these interest free loans will be set at \$75 per month for 36 months total. At the loan repayment, each borrower will receive a match savings of 10% of the total loan. As always, borrowers are also matched with financial mentors and attend financial literacy classes.
- **The next task force meeting will be held on Feb 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022 at 1:30pm on Microsoft Teams.**