



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

Ron DeSantis
Governor

Chad Poppell
Secretary

MEMORANDUM

DATE: Feb 21st, 2021
TO: Members of the Orlando Area Refugee Task Force
FROM: David Draper, Refugee Services (RS)
SUBJECT: Feb 10th, 2021, Task Force Meeting Minutes

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR:

Date: Wednesday, Apr 14th, 2021
Time: 10:00 A.M. - 12:00 Noon
Location: Microsoft Teams or TBA

Contact: David Draper
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This task force has been active in the Orlando area for many years. The participants are representatives of various government agencies, private not-for-profit organizations and mutual assistance associations. An average of about thirty to thirty-five 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 at the local, state and national level, request for proposals, training, workshops, conferences, discuss refugee service needs and explore solutions to those needs. Meeting participants 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!

400 W. Robinson Street, S1111C, Orlando, Florida 32801

ORLANDO AREA REFUGEE TASK FORCE MEETING

INTRODUCTION

This meeting was held through Microsoft Teams. Approximately 68 people were in attendance. David Draper, Community Liaison Manager, represented the Florida Department of Children and Families, Refugee Services (RS) Program. Rosa Chaves, Community Liaison for the Central Region, was also present. Everyone introduced themselves and the agencies that they represented.

Special presentation

- **Ahmed Khan Esq. – Engagement Coordinator SWFL Council on American-Islamic Relations Florida, C.A.I.R.** provided an overview about their nonprofit organization and services they provide to refugee and non-refugee communities in five places throughout the State of Florida. They were established in 2001. CAIR enhances the understanding of Islam, protects civil rights, promotes justice, empowers American Muslims, and provides legal aid.
- **Michael Holbrook –Director of Comprehensive Refugee Services Catholic Charities Central Florida**, provided an overview of the Employment Program “Past, Present and Future” and its benefits to refugees. He presented a video that outlined services. In this video, he interviewed Catholic Charities staff who understood the entire refugee process including employment services. At the moment, the most frequent jobs are in restaurants, production, and in the cafeteria at Orange County Public Schools system.

GENERAL UPDATES/ ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Anne Packham, Marketplace Project Coordinator** informed the task of a special open enrollment in Marketplace from February 15 through May 15.
- **Felipe Sousa-Matos - City of Orlando**, is putting on several events in honor of Black History Month. They are also hosting an annual Ramadan dinner. H.O.L.A. is also currently providing services to the community.
- **Vesna Bozic, USCIS Community Relations Officer**, informed the task force that the Orlando USCIS Director is moving to the Regional USCIS. The Jacksonville Office Director will oversee the Orlando office in the meantime. In Orlando, citizenship and permanent residency interviews are taking 6-8 months. Applicants can create accounts to follow progress. USCIS are hosting conferences Wednesdays at 11:00am and Thursdays at 7:00pm regarding Immigration overviews and naturalization. They may expand these to languages other than English.

- **Peyton Willington – Community Engagement Specialist**, informed the task force that they are serving low-literacy adults in Central Florida. They are also conducting online citizenship classes, job skill classes, and tutoring. They can provide services virtually or online.
 - **Melissa Jaramillo- Step Up for Students**, informed the task force that they are opening applications for the new school year (which starts on August 2021).
 - **Sandra Algarin – Community Health Centers**, is providing vaccinations for individuals 65 years and older.
 - **Wellington Ovalle – Department of Labor Federal Investigator**, is working with the Haitian Community to conduct outreach events and inform them of current labor laws.
 - **Michael Holbrook – Catholic Charities Director**, stated that Comprehensive Refugee Services Program is doing well. They have seen an increase of walk-in clients (Cubans and Haitians). In January they had 43 new clients and in February (to date) they have seen 50 new clients thus far. Many of these new clients require legal (employment-related immigration) services
- Monica Araujo, Catholic Charities Case manager**, informed the task force that in January they received many new Cuban clients. In February they have received many Haitian clients. After some outreach to the social security offices, clients are having success obtaining social security numbers.
- **David Draper, Department of Children and Families Refugee Services Community Liaison Manager** encouraged task force members to continue checking the DCF website for Covid-19 updates on operations and changes to benefits. Florida continues to see Cuban and Haitian arrivals as well as some Venezuelans being approved for asylum.

NEXT MEETING

Date: Wednesday April 14th, 2021

Time: 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM.

Location: Virtual Microsoft Teams

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