



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

**Ron DeSantis**  
Governor

**Shevaun L. Harris**  
Secretary

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**DATE:** May 12, 2021  
**TO:** Members of the Southwest Florida Refugee Task Force  
**FROM:** Janet Blair, Refugee Services (RS)  
**SUBJECT:** May 5th, 2021 Meeting Minutes

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

**Date:** August 25th, 2021  
**Time:** 1:00-3:00pm  
**Location:** Microsoft Teams

**Contact:** Janet Blair  
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This task force has been active in the South West Florida area for many years. The participants are representatives of various government agencies, private not-for-profit organizations, and mutual assistance associations. An average of 35 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, 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!*

## SWFL REFUGEE TASK FORCE MEETING MINUTES

This meeting was held via Microsoft Teams and Janet Blair and David Draper represented Refugee Services, Dept. of Children & Families (DCF). There were **42** in attendance and the meeting began at 1:05pm.

- Janet gave a welcome to all participants and David shared guidelines regarding the focus of the meeting.

### **Presentations**

This meeting had a legal focus with presentation from the national and local level.

- The first presentation was from Julia Heming Segal, with the US Dept of Justice, Civil Rights Division and her focus was on refugees & asylees right to work.
- The second presentation was from Carol O'Callaghan, the director of Legal Aide of Collier County and she gave an overview of the free legal services available to refugee clients.
- The next presentation was from Lisa Murray, managing attorney with Gulf Coast Legal Services who gave an overview of the free legal services available in Manatee & Sarasota counties.
- Andrew Banyai of the Lee County Legal Aid Society also shared information on free legal resources for clients residing in Lee County.
- And finally, the new Director of Legal Services at LSF, Fernando Chavez, was introduced and shared information about the employment immigration related services available at Lutheran Services, Florida.

### **Comprehensive Refugee Services Update**

- Lutheran Services, Florida provided the update on refugee services. All LSF offices in Sarasota, Lee and Collier counties are seeing an increase in arrivals. Most new arrivals are Cubans who are crossing the border, but there has also been an increase in Haitian families who are arriving in Manatee/Sarasota counties primarily.

### **Special Recognition**

- The task force recognized Rosemarie Connor, LCSW, director of the LSF Comprehensive Refugee Services program in SWFL for her years of dedicated services & exemplary leadership in both the Tampa Bay and SWFL area. A slide show put together by the LSF staff in SWFL was shown and Lourdes Mesias, David Draper and Janet Blair shared words of appreciation and a certificate was also given to Rosemarie in recognition of her service.

**NEXT MEETING:** August 25th, 2021 at 1:00pm, on Microsoft Teams, please contact Janet Blair with any questions regarding the task force at [Janet.Blair@myflfamilies.com](mailto:Janet.Blair@myflfamilies.com)