



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

Ron DeSantis
Governor

Shevaun L. Harris
Secretary

DATE: October 8, 2021
TO: Members of the Southwest Florida Refugee Task Force
FROM: Janet Blair, Refugee Services (RS)
SUBJECT: August 25th 2021 Meeting Minutes

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR:

Date: November 10th, 2021
Time: 1:00-3:00pm
Location: Microsoft Teams

Contact: Janet Blair
Phone: (813) 545-1716
Fax: (813) 558-5598
E-Mail: Janet.Blair@myflfamilies.com
David.Draper@myflfamilies.com

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 **50** in attendance and the meeting began at 1:04pm. Janet gave a welcome to all participants and David shared guidelines regarding the focus of the meeting.

Presentations

This meeting had the following presentations:

- Faye Steinhauser, director of Project Prosper, gave an overview of the Advance Child Tax Credit and what refugee clients can expect from this program. Project Prosper is a financial literacy and loans program in Tampa Bay that is considering expanding to SWFL in the future. More information and financial resources can be found at <https://www.projectprosper.org/>
- Don Jarrell, Community Relations Officer, gave USCIS updates and information. Legal Permanent Resident applicants (green cards) will now need to provide proof of covid vaccination as of October 1, 2021. Other information and updates can be found at <https://www.uscis.gov/>
- Christine McKee, Community Partner Liaison Coordinator in the Policy and Strategic Partnerships program gave an overview of the new DCF Care Navigation program. This program will be fully active within the SunCoast region within a few weeks. More details on this evolving program can be found at <https://www.myflfamilies.com/APathwaytoProsperity/>
- Noelia Martinez-Irizarry, gave an overview of the language and literacy services offered by Lee County Libraries which include learning devices that can be checked out from the library to learn English. More information can be found at <https://www.lee.gov.com/library/services/literacy-services>

Program Updates

- Lutheran Services, Florida has a new director of the SWFL comprehensive refugee services, Lillian Pagan, who will be housed in the Fort Myers office. LSF continues to see a steady stream of clients who are crossing the border and has seen a real increase in Haitian families, particularly in the Manatee/Sarasota area.
- Catholic Charities, diocese of Venice, is no longer providing any refugee services. Their Match Grant program is closed and Gulf Coast Jewish Family & Community Services has applied to administer this program.
- ESS has a tremendous workload with staffing shortages so cases are taking longer to process
- Dept of Health in Collier shared that they have seen 60-75 clients arriving each month. All are Cuban/Haitian.
- Lee County Adult Education is now open for registration for fall classes. There will be both in-person and virtual classes offered. In person classes are open in 8 different locations.

NEXT MEETING: November 7th, 2021 at 1:00pm, on Microsoft Teams, please contact Janet Blair with any questions regarding the task force at Janet.Blair@myflfamilies.com