



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

Ron DeSantis

**Chad Poppell**  
Secretary

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## **MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** March 19, 2021

**TO:** Members of the Tallahassee Refugee Task Force

**FROM:** Theresa Leslie, Refugee Services (RS)

**SUBJECT:** Task Force Meeting Minutes for March 9, 2021

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

**Date:** June 8, 2021  
**Time:** 10:00 AM to 11:30 PM  
**Location:** Department of Children and Families  
Conference Call via TEAMS unless advised otherwise  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

**Contact:** Theresa Leslie  
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This task force has been active in the Tallahassee area in the past few years. The participants are representatives of various government agencies, private not-for-profit organizations and volunteer groups. An average of about twenty to twenty-five attend 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, 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.

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## **TALLAHASSEE AREA REFUGEE TASK FORCE MEETING**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The meeting was held via conference call with the Department of Children and Families Refugee Staff. Theresa Leslie called the meeting to order.

### **PRESENTATIONS**

1. The first guest presenter was introduced. Joya McCarty from the Leon County Health Department is the Environmental Health Manager and Deputy Manager for COVID-19 Vaccine. She presented the update on vaccine distribution as her agency is collaborating with two hospitals, the public health department, and the federal health center in Leon County. Ms. McCarty mentioned that the county has streamlined the drive-through process for those 65 and over and has partnered with Star Metro, the public transportation provider, to offer free bus rides to the vaccine site. Lyft Rides/Dial-a-Ride provides "home to vaccine site" rides to those without transportation who also qualify.

Ms. McCarty mentioned the pharmacies, Publix's and other sites have begun to administer the vaccines. She recommended that the public refer to the Leon County Public Health Department and the City of Tallahassee websites for the daily updates, the sign up/appointment process, times, and locations. This information changes often.

She also advised that the Governor announced that there will be changes to the age group who qualifies for the vaccine very soon. School, law enforcement, and fire department staff 50 years old and older are also qualified. Ms. McCarty, the Community Liaison, and International Rescue Committee will coordinate the appointment and application process for the refugees who consent to take the vaccine.

The Task Force appreciates her information and caution to check the media and websites often for updates.

**2. International Rescue Committee, Una Bilic, Site Manager presented program updates and current successes and challenges:**

IRC reported that for the past year staff, interns, and volunteers have been working remotely at home while assisting refugee clients through Zoom and What's App applications. However, since January 2021 the office has been staffed with one person from 9 AM to 5 PM, Monday through Friday. This allows for appointments, completion of paperwork, and other case management activities.

Clients are reported to be healthy and September arrivals are working to obtain employment. They have been participating in their ESOL (English) classes at the Adult and Community Education Center.

A few refugees have gone back to work where they left last March due to the "Safer at Home" approach in dealing with the Pandemic. A few long-term refugees are still employed at a local landscaping and garden center where they have been working for almost 2 years.

IRC reported that an AmeriCorps Vista employee and university interns are making calls to find other jobs for the other clients.

Clients are also getting the maximum amount allowable of their SNAP benefits. IRC used their other funding streams to pay rent for many of the refugees during the past year.

IRC explained that many local refugees have approached the time when they can apply for citizenship. This will be a busy year for the clients with the assistance of FSU Center for the Advancement of Human Rights.

The AmeriCorps Vista person, Tristan Jahn gave an update of the volunteer mentors who are working with students through Zoom, in school visits, or some are making home visits.

This Mentoring program focuses on civic and social engagement while also supporting each client's individual educational and vocational advancement. The program is designed to give these individuals extra guidance and experiences that will contribute to their future.

3. The final presenter, Liza Samd, an attorney with the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), Immigrant and Employee Rights has made herself available to speak at Refugee Task Forces statewide to offer information and assistance for clients regarding documentation requirements related to work. She also offered assistance with clarifying what a refugee/asylee needs for employment especially

during the past year as local Social Security offices have been closed during the pandemic.

While encouraging Refugee staff and clients to make appointments with their local SS office, she stressed to call her office directly with “dire situations” issues. She affirmed that obtaining employment is a “dire situation”.

Her office covers such topics as: I-9 issues, Background checks, SS requirements, electronic payroll, Banks, COVID changes, US Citizenship requirements, E-Verify/SAVE, and DMV/badging issues.

The web address and hotline numbers for employees and employers is listed below:

<https://www.justice.gov/ier>

IER employee hotline: 1-800-255-7688

IER employer hotline: 1-800-255-8155

Unfortunately, the above 3 presentations took the entire time scheduled and the partner updates will be first on the agenda for the next task force meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 AM

**Next Meeting:**

Tuesday, June 8, 2021

10:00 to 11:30 AM

Department of Children and Families

Tallahassee, FL 32399

TEAMS CALL unless otherwise advised

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