



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

Ron DeSantis
Governor

Shevaun Harris
Secretary

DATE: May 12, 2021
TO: Members of the Tampa Bay Refugee Task Force
FROM: Janet Blair, Refugee Services (RS)
SUBJECT: **April 27th, 2021 Meeting Minutes**

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR:

Date: August 31, 2021
Time: 1:30 P.M. – 3:30 P.M.
Location: Microsoft Teams

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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 50 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 **87** individuals were present and the meeting was called to order at 1:35pm.

- Janet Blair opened the meeting with a welcome and overview of the meeting's agenda. David Draper shared guidelines regarding the focus of the meeting.
- Task Force Updates:
Janet announced openings for appointments at the upcoming University of South Florida (USF) Refugee Free Clinic held May 26 and June 23. Flyers with information on making referrals was distributed. The clinic is a task force partnership with USF's College of Medicine and provides free medical care for refugees and asylum seekers without Medicaid or insurance.
Janet also shared translated flyers on identification required at Covid-19 vaccine appointments. The Florida Dept of Health was thanked for getting flyers translated into Swahili and Arabic.
- The Mental Health Minute was given by Florence Ackey, MSW. The topic for this meeting addressed the importance of adhering to confidentiality requirements when working with refugee clients.

Presentations

The focus of this meeting was on legal resources and included both national and local presentations.

- Liza Zamd, Sr Trial Attorney, U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division in the Immigrant and Employee Rights Section gave the first presentation focused on the rights of refugees and asylees to work.
- The second presentation was given by Haley Coet, Supervising Attorney for the Family Law Team at the legal aid organization in Pinellas County, Gulf Coast Legal Services, and Haley gave an overview of their programs & services.
- The next presentation was from Carlos Benacourt with Bay Area Legal Services, the legal aid organization in Hillsborough County and Carlos also gave a programmatic overview.
- The final presentation was from Fernando Chavez, the new Legal Director at Lutheran Services, Florida (LSF) and he gave an overview of the legal services provided in the Refugee Services immigration program.

Provider & Community Partner Updates:

- An update on the Comprehensive Refugee Services Program (CRS) was given by Lutheran Services, Florida (LSF) and Gulf Coast Jewish Family & Community Services (GCJFCS). There has been a real increase in arrivals in the past two months, with over 800 arriving to Tampa Bay. Most arrivals are Cuban border crossers, and some are arriving with I-94 documentation. LSF's Tampa office is now open Saturdays and some weeknights to accommodate the new arrivals.

- The Dept of Health is now providing Covid vaccines. For new arrivals, information on the vaccine is provided at their first appointment and the vaccine is given when they return.
- Task Force members are continuing to collaborate on vaccination outreach with several educational sessions in key languages being held for clients and a variety of translated materials & videos being disseminated.
- Task Force committees on outreach, education and mental health continue to meet at least quarterly to address issues or concerns in those arenas and Hillsborough/Pinellas specific community/provider meetings are also being held regularly.
- In closing, special recognition was given to two front line case managers, **Saskia Rivero from LSF and Thet Win at GCJFCS**. These two individual professionals were singled out for their years of exemplary service to local refugees and certificates of appreciation from the task force were given to both.
- Upcoming Task Force meetings will be held on August 31 and December 7 at 1:30pm. All meetings will be on Microsoft Teams unless otherwise announced. Contact Janet Blair at Janet.Blair@myflfamilies.com with any questions regarding the task force.