



State of Florida
Department of Children and Families

Ron DeSantis
Governor

Shevaun L. Harris
Secretary

MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 15, 2022
TO: Members of the Tallahassee Refugee Task Force
FROM: Theresa Leslie, Refugee Services (RS)
SUBJECT: Task Force Meeting Minutes for March 8, 2022

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING IS SCHEDULED FOR:

Date: June 14, 2022
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
Office: (850) 778-4065
Cell: (850) 445-4040
E-Mail: Theresa.Leslie@myflfamilies.com

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 people 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.

Mission: Protect the Vulnerable, Promote Strong and Economically Self-Sufficient Families, and Advance Personal and Family Recovery and Resiliency

5920 Arlington Expressway, Jacksonville, Florida 32211

Mission: Work in Partnership with Local Communities to Protect the Vulnerable, Promote Strong and Economically Self-Sufficient Families, and Advance Personal and Family Recovery and Resiliency

TALLAHASSEE AREA REFUGEE TASK FORCE MEETING

INTRODUCTION

The meeting was held via a Microsoft TEAMS conference call with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) Refugee Services (RS) Program. Theresa Leslie called the meeting to order.

David Draper, DCF Refugee Services, provided “Opening Remarks” and reminded the group of the purpose and intent for the local RS Task Force.

PRESENTATIONS

Welcoming Afghan Refugees

CAIR Florida, Inc., Council on American-Islamic Relations

Speaker: Hiba Rahim

As it has been several years since a Refugee Services provider and community partners in Tallahassee worked with families from Afghanistan, task force members requested a cultural refresher course. It was explained to Ms. Rahim from the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) that Tallahassee/Leon County area has little experience with Afghans and is anxious to know more about this group as they assimilate.

The participants were told that other Refugee task forces and various community leaders around the state invited Ms. Rahim to speak about the Afghan culture, especially points worthy of mentioning that shows respect and understanding. She received excellent reviews.

Many of the topics the handout the CAIR organization distributed were discussed and often further explanations were given per the audience request.

Adult and Community Education, Enrollment and Orientation

ESOL-English – Adult & Community Education School

Speaker: Catherine Baham

As Ms. Baham has been on this Task Force for several years, she and other staff have made special accommodations for several refugee groups with varying levels of English speaking and other literacy skills. There have been times when they had to place an adult student on a one-on-one teacher ratio due to the low literacy level even in their first language. This group understands and knows first-hand ACE’s strong commitment to teaching English to refugees.

Ms. Baham was happy to report that they have welcomed the students back in the classrooms. Attendance and progress with virtual English classes with ACE during the past two years was satisfactory but not ideal.

Since January 2022, their attendance with Afghan and Syrian adults is currently at 30 students. During the last testing phase, some refugees jumped two levels. Many advanced at least one level. Other refugees are attending to improve their reading and writing English skills.

Ms. Baham reports that she offers attendance reports to IRC and the case managers to be kept in the case files. She also refers students to the Literacy Volunteer Program for tutoring services.

ACE staff, including Ms. Baham, report their continued discussions to re-instate the evening bus route with Star Metro from ACE at Lively Technical Institute so refugee students and others can attend evening classes.

Tips on how to best use Language Line, LanguageLine Solutions

Speaker: Joe Matthews

Task Force partners and providers around the state regularly mention their challenges with connecting with Dari and Pashto speaking translators needed for the huge influx of Afghans in Florida.

Joe Matthews was introduced as the representative from LanguageLine Solutions, Inc for Florida and has been with this company for over 15 years. He reported that it was no surprise that for the first 6 months to a year after the Afghans began arriving in the United States it took a while to meet the national capacity. Florida was no exception. This group arrived quickly and in large numbers and needed immediate services with local providers and agencies.

LanguageLine rushed to step up their recruitment which shortened the wait time for a translator. They tripled their capacity for Pashto and Dari. They also had to modify a few of their operations to meet the national needs efficiently and fairly. Mr. Matthews has been speaking to the other Refugee Task Forces in Florida which should improve service delivery.

Reports of dropped calls, long wait times, and missed appointments have been greatly reduced in Tallahassee. Ms. Matthews gave a few tips to the partners and providers.

- It is best to avoid Mondays as that is the busiest day for LanguageLine.
- Mid-day is also very busy within the U.S.
- The average wait time for requesting a translator for Pashto and Dari is now 15-20 minutes
- Call Mr. Matthews with any issues and he will do his best to correct the situation.

- If a translator call is dropped, again, please call Mr. Matthews directly as he will delete any charges to the provider.
- If staff want to practice using the Line again alert Mr. Matthew and he will assure there are no charges.
- Mr. Matthews contact information
J-Matthews@languagelines.com 1-800-752-6096 Option #2

IRC: Important Updates, Challenges, and Good News

David Oliver, Deputy Director IRC, Tallahassee

Leann Halsey, Site Manager

David Oliver and Leann Halsey from IRC reported IRC updates.

- November and December were the busiest months for arriving Afghans. Very few are still in temporary housing (most are in permanent housing)
- Staff changes:
- Issabelle Frye, the AmeriCorps Vista staff with Mentor Program has shifted to a position that will support Reception and Placement, APA, and Match Grant staff and clients.
- Karissa Hametta, Employment Specialist resigned to move out of state.
- Both positions are advertised.
- Additional Clients are now working and coordinating their transportation at the local hospital, meat packing plant, hotels, drycleaners, grocery stores.
- Sewing positions are being sought as many Afghan and Syrian ladies are excellent in this area.
- Housing accommodations are available and increasing in Leon County as University graduations created many openings.

Task Force Members were thanked by Mr. Draper and Ms. Leslie for their input, attention, and on-going commitment to the refugees in Tallahassee working with IRC.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 AM

Next Meeting:

Tuesday, June 14, 2022

10:00 to 11:30 AM

Contact: Theresa.Leslie@myflfamilies.com Phone: (850) 778-4065

David.Draper@myflfamilies.com Phone: (407) 317-7335