

San Diego Refugee Forum

General Meeting Minutes – February 19, 2007

I. Call to order at 10:40 am

Diana Ross

Present: Lejla Voloder, Diana Ross, Arek Strezelecki, Elizabeth Lou, Dan Breuninger, John Wilkie, Virginia West, Bonnie Copland, Juana Duenas, Barbara Jimenez, Ralph Achenbach, Ana Quinonez, Celia Balistreri, Dung Le, Paulino Paida, Tiana Reinhardt Lee, Sara Goepfert, Chrissy Cmorik, Heide Bruckner, Sakara Tear, Besma Coda, Samantha Hurst, Paula Lloyd, Hamadi Madisa, Dena Lewerke, Barbara Tucker

II. Introductions

III. Minutes and Announcements

- Barbara Jimenez noted the correct spelling of her last name.
- Motion to approve minutes: Paulino Paida, Second: Ana Quinonez
- All approved, no nays, no abstentions

- Barbara Tucker reported that Maximus currently is seeking a Somali-/Arabic-speaking case manager.
- Ralph Achenbach reported that the IRC Economic Development Programs prepared 26 returns for refugees and asylees in one week, generating \$54,000 in refunds and credits and approx. \$5,000 in fee savings. Free tax preparation services continue by appointment from 10 am – 4 pm, February 4 – April 11, or without appointment at the following walk-in times: Saturday, February 23 and March 15, 10 am – 4 pm; Wednesday, February 27 and March 26, 6 pm – 9 pm. Fliers were provided in English, Arabic, Somali and Vietnamese and are also available in Farsi, and Swahili.
- Diana Ross introduced Barbara Jimenez as the new County Refugee Coordinator.
- Diana Ross noted that that CalWorks-funded mental health clinic at UPAC will be scaling back, and a discussion ensued as to the repercussions for existing clients and the linguistic and cultural abilities of other clinics.
- Diana Ross introduced Besma Coda of the Chaldean-Middle Eastern Social Services (CMSS). Besma explained that CMSS is a County-funded mental health agency serving the Chaldean and Arabic-speaking Middle Eastern Communities which opened last month. They are partnering with the El Cajon School District in a parenting education program and with Catholic Charities in a cardiovascular health program and are seeking assistance with bilingual job placements.
- Heide Bruckner announced that a collaborative effort of 20 agencies has set June 2008 as the launch goal for the new City Heights Open Air Market, and that vendor applications and applications from interested community partners are being accepted at the moment.
- Paulino Paida announced a state-sponsored nutrition workshop held from March 6th – March 7th. The registration deadline is February 21st.
- John Wilkie and Virginia West announced that the County will be holding a series of information sessions to educate and elicit ideas for new programs. They distributed fliers with workshop dates and topics.

IV. Report from Officers and Committees

- Lejla Voloder reported that the transition from Union Bank of California to Washington Mutual has been successful. The current account balance is \$1,400.09, with the most recent transaction a \$100 credit from new member dues. There were no debits since the last report.

San Diego Refugee Forum

General Meeting Minutes – February 19, 2007

V. *Focus: City Heights CDC – Neighborhood First Initiative*

- Sakara Tear of City Heights CDC explained that over the last two months a collaboration of eight agencies in the Colina Park neighborhood have been engaging residents to identify the strengths and weaknesses perceived within the area with an aim to compiling a plan to improve the quality of life pertaining to health, safety, education, recreation and infrastructure improvement issues. After 97 interviews and one youth summit, issues identified to date include gang activity and cultural frictions in school. Sakara provided a flier for a kick-off planning event to bring youth and adults together to be held on February 23rd.

VI. *By-law amendments*

- Diana Ross presented the draft by-law amendments based on last year's strategic planning process and retreat. Suggested changes affect the following areas: purpose, function, dues, voting, terms of office and committees. All present received a copy of the draft. There will be a vote on whether to accept the amendments during the March 2008 general meeting. Virginia West noted that 'quarterly' needs to be changed to 'monthly' and that it needs to be clarified that member dues are on an annual basis.

A discussion ensued on how representatives from the refugee communities can be engaged in Forum meetings and activities.

VII. *Committee Work*

- Arek Strezelecki, Elizabeth Lou and Dena Lewerke reported on behalf of the Advocacy Committee on the results of last month's survey. It was clarified that short-term issues are defined as issues specific to an individual or a family which require immediate attention, whereas long-term issues are of a more general nature. Elizabeth's contact information will be added to the Forum website for attention to short-term issues.

A discussion ensued about health care for refugees and asylees following the initial eight-month period.

- Diana Ross reported on behalf of the Event Committee that the committee's goal is to host a mini-resource festival in June to coincide with World Refugee Day and that for that purpose a commitment from all members is necessary.
- Diana Ross elicited feedback from the floor concerning Forum communication. There was consensus that email communication in its current form is effective, but that the sharing of contact information between service providers needs to be improved. Ralph Achenbach noted that the ad hoc Website Committee intends to incorporate a member and resource directory on the Forum website to address this issue.

VIII. *Provider Reports*

- Tabled until the next meeting

IX. *State Advisory Report*

- Tabled until the next meeting

X. *Adjournment at 12:00 noon*