**Minutes of the San Diego Refugee Forum Meeting**

**Date**: Tuesday, March 16, 2021

**Location**: Zoom meeting

**Time**: 10:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

**Attendees:**

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| Abdi Abdillahi, SD County Refugee Coordinator | Kathy Yang, State Refugee Coordinator |
| Afrah Abdulkader, IRC Survivor Advocate | Kim Roser-Kedward, LCSW Miramar College CalWORKs |
| Alexis Burnstan, UCSD TASET Project | Kim Thomas, American Academy of Pediatrics |
| Ali Khalaf, San Diego Youth Services | Lauren Kocher, CA Refugee Programs Bureau |
| Amanda Urena, SD Unified School District | Lida Dianti, IRC |
| Ana Lozano, United Healthcare | Lilian Matingkwony, SAY San Diego |
| Ann Vilmenay, COSD-HHSA-BHS-AOA | Lily Mojdehi, JFS |
| Awichu Akwanya, SDRF Chair, UW East Africa | Lucia Gonzales |
| Bethlehem Degu | Lucy Jasso, San Diego Youth Services |
| Bill Sutton, Catholic Charities | Maya Kurkhill, Claremont-McKenna College |
| Bob Walsh, SDRF Secretary | Mejgan Afshan, SDRF Treasurer, Borderlands of Equity |
| Brett Hall, CHIP Comm. Health Improvement Program | Melissa Casanova, First 5 First Steps, Home Start |
| Carol Crisp, PCG | Melon |
| Carol Lewis, El Cajon Collaborative | Michael Serban, FACE Dept. CVUSD |
| Cipriano Vargas, Office of Supervisor Lawson-Remer | Michelle Ly, UPAC |
| Clint Carney, Survivors of Torture Intl | Miriam, UWEAST |
| Dan Nyamangah, SAY San Diego | Mohammed Tuama, , Newcomers Support and Dev |
| Dilkhwaz Ahmed, License to Freedom | Nadia Moshirian Binderup, Sheriff's Dept. |
| Elizabeth Jackson, A Better Life Together | Nora David, County Community Health Services, Adult |
| Emily Merrill, Jewish Family Service | Noon, JFS Breaking Down Barriers |
| Faiza Warsame, UWEAST | Paw Wah, Karen Organization |
| Farhat Popal, City SD Immigrant Affairs Mgr | Rahmo Abdi, PANA |
| Giselle Barajas, Jewish Family Service | Rashid Essa |
| Gloria Cruz, Office of County Sup. Lawson-Remer | Renee Nasori, Grossmont College |
| Hawi Abdulkadir, Somali Family Service | Rita Shamoon, CALWORKS job developer |
| Hector Peralta, community member | Roberta Krauss, SD Continuing Ed CalWORKs |
| iPhone | Ross Fackrell, SDRF Vice Chair, IRC |
| Irene Elizabeth Garcia, COSD Childhood Lead Preven | Sainab W |
| Jacqueline Hom | Sandra Candler, FACE Dept. CVUSD |
| Jane Hoey, Women's Empowerment Intl  | Shlyn Guarian, County Child Welfare Services |
| Jane Register, World Relief SoCal | Tania Rivera, IRC Emergency Resources |
| Janice Raymond, FACE Dept. CVUSD | Ute Maschke, CAEP, East Region Adult Ed |
| Jessica Hernandez, East Region Adult Education | Vernita Gutierrez, Planned Parenthood Pacific SW |
| Judy Amaro, PCG Central | Vickie White, City of SD Planning |
| Kait Dugan, Center for Community Solutions | Zac Norbash |
| Kathi Anderson, Survivors of Torture Intl | 19789----- |

Meeting facilitator: Awichu Akwanya, SDRF Chair

**1. Greetings and introduction of attendees** Awichu Akwanya, Chair

**2.** **Treasurer’s report** Mejgan Afshan, Treasurer

For 2021 we now have 40 memberships; thank you to all who have joined. Organizations or individuals who would like to join may do so on the Forum website, <http://www.sdrefugeeforum.org/> at the Members page; see the instructions there. Be reminded that ECBOs (ethnic community-based organizations) are allowed a reduced membership fee. For questions or further information about membership please contact Treasurer Mejgan Afshan at sdrefugeeforum@gmail.com.

**3. Resettlement update** Abdi Abdillahi, County Refugee Coordinator; Kathy Yang, State Coordinator

For the month of February 2021, San Diego resettled a total of 73. Of this total, there was 1 primary refugee, from Iraq (1%); 4 Cubans and 62 Haitians (90%), and 6 SIVs (8%). Also, out of the 73 arrivals for February 2021, 6 were singles or couples with no children, and 67 were families.

Total for the Year-to-Date FFY 20-21 (October 2020 through February 2021), San Diego resettled 185. Out of this total, 31 were primary refugees (17%); 2 Asylees (1%); 115 Cuban/Haitians (62%); and 37 SIVs (20%).

The top three arrivals for FFY 20-21, Haiti with 59%; followed by Afghanistan with 22%, and Iraq with 9%.

Kathy Yang, State Refugee Coordinator, attended the meeting and gave an update on the state and national refugee pictures. For FY 2021 (starting October 1, 2020) totals for Refugee and SIV Arrivals are:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Placement**  | **Refugees**  | **SIVs**  | **Total**  | **% of Refugees**  | **% of SIVs**  |
| Nationwide (other than CA) | 1,568  | 1,140  | 2,708  | 88%  | 62%  |
| California  | 211  | 689  | 900  | 12%  | 38%  |
| **Total**  | **1,779**  | **1,829**  | **3,608**  | **100%**  | **100%**  |

Of California’s 900 total arrivals, 616 went to Sacramento, 74 to San Diego, 63 to Los Angeles, and the remainder to four other counties.

Other announcements

Abdi also announced that the County of San Diego’s Emergency Rent and Utilities Assistance Program (ERAP) application period has been extended through March 31, 2021. The program prevents evictions and housing instability for low-income renters who have faced financial hardships due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The County’s ERAP serves renters countywide except those residing in the cities of San Diego and Chula Vista. The program is open to renters who have experienced financial hardship directly or indirectly related to COVID-19 or have qualified for unemployment during the pandemic. Income and other restrictions apply. See County website at <https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/sdhcd/community-development/COVID-19-Emergency-Rental-Assistance-Program.html>.

Kathy Yang announced that refugee cash assistance waivers will be continued through April 30. People who were eligible may continue to receive cash aid and social services. The federal government is considering whether to extend this to September 30.

California is also planning to continue the Newcomer project for schools.

**4. Task force update Bob Walsh, Secretary**

The initiative to revive the Forum’s task forces is going well. Volunteer totals so far:

Advocacy 1
Asylum 5
Domestic Violence 2
Education 7
Employment 1
Health 2
World Refugee Day Event Planning 4

The groups have started organizing. Anyone wanting to get involved please write to the forum and we will connect you, at sdrefugeeforum@gmail.com .

**5. Presentation 1:** Overview of Child Welfare Services Shlyn Guarian, County Child Welfare Services

Shlyn is the Community Outreach Liaison for Child Welfare Services, Central Region. She presented an overview of what Child Welfare Services offers the community. She said the first duty of everyone involved is to keep children safe. In cases where abuse or neglect has been reported and brought to the attention of CWS, their social workers and staff work with families to create a safety plan. Their office wants to work with community members to make sure they know what their rights are, how they can make complaints or resolve conflicts. Coming to the Forum can help them inform the community through agencies, and also gather information to transmit back to CWS to make sure people get CWS services they need.

Many people don’t understand how CWS works to protect children, and CWS presentations to the community can help with that situation. They will do a CWS overview about how they investigate child abuse and neglect to help them understand that process. Starting with the abuse hotline through to court and closure, how they work with families. CWS does more than this, also provide adoption services, a community advisory board, show how to file a complaint or to be a foster parent. This is available online. They need resource family homes from different cultural backgrounds for placements.

Please contact Shlyn to learn more about CWS and to arrange outreach to your communities. Please call or email. I will be happy to see how we can be a support - Child Welfare Services - Shlyn Guarian, 619.917.5481, Shlyn.Guarian@sdcounty.ca.gov

In response to questions:

-Some numbers: IN 2020 1,100 petitions were filed for child removal from homes. Hotline took in 40,000 calls of neglect and CWS did 22,000 investigations.

- Placements outside the home have at least a monthly follow-up. After a child welfare referral is closed they can no longer make contact. If the court is involved, follow-up is required regarding therapy and visitation.

- In cases of removal, including when refugees are involved, CWS first looks to the other family members or relatives. There is an interview and approval process involved. If there is no one close to the family, then they look to the community, people who speak the child’s language. They work with the family and community to find an appropriate placement.

- They have some ethnic professional staff but are looking to recruit more. They also work with interpretive services when necessary.

**Presentation 2:** Urban Beats Program of United Women of East Africa Faiza Warsame

Urban Beats is an innovative artistic expression program for transitional age youth who are at risk of mental health challenges. It uses the arts and social media as a platform for these youth to express themselves and help improve their wellness and self-sufficiency. It also aims to use art to de-stigmatize mental illness and related therapeutic services.

Youth who find interest in creative or artistic activities with peers join or are referred to the program to help them explore their feelings and find ways to express their feelings through activities such as dancing, singing and painting, or creating a magazine. Then sharing their artistic creations through exhibits and performance.

They carry out the program through educational cohorts and virtual workshops, along with community outreach and peer support.

In response to questions:

- Send email to connect: Faiza Warsame fwarsame@uweast.org

- The program can connect people to therapists.

- UWEAST also has other programs.

- The group is open to performing for the SDRF World Refugee Day event.

**6. Community Announcements**

Vicki White, City of San Diego Planning Dept.

The department is working on a project to address environmental justice in terms of disparities in health and physical conditions in the city. There is now opportunity for citizen input on things like air quality, condition of housing, access to parks, etc. We need to ask our communities to identify their concerns. She can provide flyers. See Environmental Justice Element web page, including introductory information and survey in 10 languages: https://www.sandiego.gov/planning/genplan/environmentjustice

My contact information, for questions, presentation requests, or flyers: vwhite@sandiego.gov

Farhat Popal, City of San Diego Immigrant Affairs Manager

The City is working to address priorities for immigrants and refugees, to promote inclusion and improve access to services. Give her ideas on how they can do this better. They are building communications platforms. See Welcoming San Diego: Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/welcomingsd); Twitter (@welcomingsd); Instagram (@welcomingsd). Farhat Popal, Immigrant Affairs Manager, City of San Diego: fpopal@sandiego.gov; (619) 679-2357

Maya Kurkhill, Claremont-McKenna College, Mgrublian Center for Human Rights

They are producing Immigration Today Newsletter to share information on immigrants and refugees around the state. They are contacting refugee organizations around the state. Contact them to share information and volunteer opportunities. mkurkhill23@cmc.edu

Mohammed Tuama, Newcomer Support and Development

Announcing a partnership for sharing information and announcements on USA in Arabic TV.

M.Tuama@NewcomerSD.org 619.900.4554

Lucy Jasso, San Diego Youth Services

We are starting programming for working with youth and children. Contact us, we can work with you on activities. ljasso@sdyouthservices.org

Elizabeth Jackson, A Better Life Together, Project Manager Community Outreach, BRIDGE Project

Join A Better Life Together each Wednesday for important and current information and resources. Tomorrow, March 17th we will have April Laster, CEO/Founder of Open Heart Leaders speaking about Mental Health Matters! RSVP for tomorrow and other upcoming speakers on our website: https://www.abetterlifetogether.org/event ejackson@abetterlifetogether.org 619.832.5990

Jessica Hernandez, East Region Adult Education

Invitation to a virtual event. East Region Adult Education virtual summit on April 9th, 2021, 9AM-12PM. Registration link: https://adultedworks.org/students/summit/ Each year, East Region Adult Education hosts a summit to offer critical reflections on the consortium’s achievements and engage regional stakeholder in conversations about possible solutions to challenges encountered.

Carol Lewis, El Cajon Collaborative

El Cajon Collaborative Meetings are the first Tuesday at 12:30 p.m. The link for the meetings: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/71342147983?pwd=aU9wd1VYckhTMDc0WjJkMjZGMDhjUT09

Anyone is welcome and we encourage residents to attend as well. Next meeting is April 6, panel discussion.

Brett Hall, San Diego Community Health Improvement Program

SPC Priority Populations & Communities Subcommittee Meeting, Thursday, 3/18 from 1-2:30pm. Zoom link: https://zoom.us/j/93719055835?pwd=WGlYUDV3ZWVaM3E2QVhZMmltNlV2dz09

Meeting ID: 937 1905 5835 Passcode: ppc21

For more information about the SPC and upcoming events please visit our website at www.spcsandiego.org or contact me (Brett Hall) at bhall@sdchip.org.

Cipriano Vargas, Gloria Cruz Office of County Supervisor Lawson-Remer

Here is a link to our newsletter, sign up for updates: https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=E69jRSnAs0G3TJZejuyPlg3c4kVM7lxBn1Z-ZRWRQItUQUFaS0pFT1FERVlBQ09YWDJJM0JHQzRBOC4u

Michelle Ly, UPAC

UPAC is recruiting for a Food Distribution Coordinator and we hope to hire from the community. They don't need to have food Distribution experience but prefer strong paperwork organization skills. It is a 1 year contract. https://recruiting.paylocity.com/recruiting/jobs/Details/461358/Union-of-Pan-Asian-Communties/Program-Coordinator---Food-Distribution

Renee Nasori, Grossmont College

We have support staff for refugees who want to continue their education. They offer free workshops. Monday April 5 for people who are thinking about going back to school. We have Adult Re-entry Center, also support with finding employment. 21st Century Skills workshop. Visit our website to learn about our programs and free workshops: grossmont.edu/careercenter Renee.Nasori@gcccd.edu

Melissa Casanova, Home Start

My name is Melissa Casanova and I am the Family Resource Specialist/Outreach Coordinator for Home Start's home visit program First 5 First Steps. We offer home visits to pregnant women and any mothers with children younger than 2 who are receiving CalWORKs. We are always taking referrals to serve the community. If you want to reach out to me via email mcasanova@home-start.org or phone (619)402-0278. I can share more information about our program.

Nadia Moshirian Binderup, San Diego Sheriff’s Office

Please inform us of concerns relevant to our office. Can help with acquiring facemasks. Nadia.Binderup@sdsheriff.org

Clint Carney and Alexis Burnstan, for the SDRF Asylum Task Force

They have had one meeting. They want to deal also with asylum seekers. They would like to connect with other task forces and advocate for prioritizing mental health assessment. They will be meeting again next Thursday. For information on Asylum Task Force meetings, email ccarney@notorture.org

Rahmo Abdi, PANA

Releasing a report next week about refugee experiences.

See also Webinar March 17: After the Riots: Is Surveillance the Answer? http://bit.ly/after-the-riots

Giselle Barajas, Jewish Family Service

Refugee Resettlement program at Jewish Family Service of San Diego. Contact info: giselleb@jfssd.org, 8586373397

Mejgan Afshan, Borderlands for Equity

Please join Borderlands for Equity and our siblings at The Feminist Front this week, as part of our "Dismantling White Supremacist Patriarchy" series, for a workshop on the history and current fight for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). With an opening unseen in a generation, hear how anti-racist feminists are fighting for the ERA, to enshrine in the Constitution protection for all from gender discrimination -- from healthcare & education to partner & state violence.

Also: Call your congressional representative to support ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. Learn about the #ERANow Campaign that centers youth and people of color across gender identity and the broad coalition that believes 2021 is finally the Year of the ERA. #ERANow: The Next Generation of Gender Justice! This Thursday, March 18th, 7:00 PM PST Register: http://Bit.ly/eranownext

For any questions, please contact me at (619) 867-7514 or email at Mejgan.Afshan@gmail.com.

Miriam, Awichu, United Women of East Africa

Food for pick up can be ordered, for April 1. Email Miriam for the menu -- miriam@uweast.org. We also have a virtual cooking class!

**7. Approval of the minutes of the February 16 meeting** Bob Walsh, Secretary

**Adjournment**: Awichu Akwanya, Chair, 11:55 a.m.

**Next Meeting**: April 20, 2021

Minutes recorded by Bob Walsh, Secretary