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

**Date**: Tuesday, May 18, 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 |
| Afrah Abdulkader, IRC Survivor Advocate |
| Alexis Burnstan, UCSD TASET Project |
| Ali Khalaf, San Diego Youth Services |
| Amanda Urena, SD Unified School District |
| Ann Vilmenay, COSD-HHSA-BHS-AOA |
| Bethlehem Degu, Family Health Centers |
| Bill Sutton, Catholic Charities |
| Bob Walsh, SDRF Secretary |
| Bowa Tucker, Office of Refugee Resettlement |
| Brett Hall, CHIP Comm. Health Improvement Program |
| Brian Tam, Refugee Services Bureau, CDSS |
| Camille Cross |
| Carol Crisp, PCG |
| Carol Lewis, El Cajon Collaborative |
| Casey Myers, One Digital World |
| Christina Griffin-Jones, WeAllWeGot |
| Cipriano Vargas, Office of Supervisor Lawson-Remer |
| Claire Enemark, SDRCC/UWEAST |
| Clint Carney, Survivors of Torture Intl |
| Dalia Mohammad, License to Freedom |
| Daria Tomsky, IRC |
| Dilkhwaz Ahmed, License to Freedom |
| Elizabeth Jackson, A Better Life Together |
| Fardosa Osman, UWEAST |
| Farhat Popal, City SD Immigrant Affairs Mgr |
| Graciela Mendoza, CA Dept. of Public Health |
| Hassan A., Somali Family Service |
| Irene Elizabeth Garcia, SD Co Child Lead Prevention |
| Jacqueline Hom, CA DSS |
| Jamie Schroer Culbert, SD County Community Health |
| Jane Hoey, Women's Empowerment Intl |
| Jane Register, World Relief SoCal |
| Jessica Hernandez, East Region Adult Education |
| Judy Amaro, PCG Central |
| Kim Roser-Kedward, LCSW Miramar College CalWORKs |
| Lauren Kocher, CA Refugee Programs Bureau |
| Leanne Carroll |
| Mejgan Afshan, SDRF Treasurer, Borderlands for Equity |
| Melanie Stanek, One Digital World |
| Melissa Casanova, First 5 First Steps, Home Start |
| Mohammed Tuama, Newcomers Support and Dev |
| Nadia Moshirian Binderup, Sheriff's Dept. |
| Officer Homayoun Nabizadeh, SDPD Comm. Relations |
| Rahmo Abdi, PANA |
| Ramah Awad, Majdal Center |
| Rashid Essa |
| Renee Nasori, Grossmont College |
| Rita Shamoon, CALWORKS job developer |
| Roberta Krauss, SD Continuing Ed CalWORKs |
| Ross Fackrell, SDRF Vice Chair, IRC |
| Shadi Haddad |
| Shlyn Guarian, County Child Welfare Services |
| Sule, SAY San Diego |
| Tania Rivera, IRC Emergency Resources |
| Vernita Gutierrez, Planned Parenthood Pacific SW |
| Yasmeen Obeid, Majdal Center |

Meeting facilitator: Ross Fackrell, SDRF Vice Chair

**1. Greetings and introduction of attendees** Ross Fackrell, SDRF Vice Chair

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

There are currently 14 paid members of the Forum. We are behind last year’s numbers. Please consider joining the Forum. Your dues go to events such as World Refugee Day. Also, money is allocated to task forces to support their activities. Membership dues are $30/year for individuals and small ECBOs and $70 for other agencies and organizations. Please reach out to Mejgan with any questions.

**3. Resettlement update** Abdi Abdillahi, County Refugee Coordinator

For the month of April 2021, San Diego resettled a total of 132 persons. Of this total, there were 15 primary refugees from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Iraq, and, and 4 Afghan SIVs. Also 99 Haitians and 13 Cubans. Out of the 132 arrivals for April 2021, 33 were singles or couples with no children, and 99 were part of families. The total for April 2021 was larger than the totals in April 2020 and April 2019.

Total for Year-to-Date FFY 20-21 (October 2020 through March 2021), San Diego resettled 474. Out of this total, 60 were primary refugees (13%); 3 Asylees (1%); 359 Cuban/Haitians (76%); and 52 SIVs (11%).

The top three arrivals for FFY 20-21: Haiti with 70%; Afghanistan with 15%, and Cuba with 6%.

See the latest County Arrivals Report posted on the Refugee Forum website.

There was also a special report from Brian Tam, Chief of Refugee Services Bureau, California Department of Social Services:

COVID Related Updates

* On April 30, 2021, ORR issued PL 21-05, which provides an additional five months of cash benefits for ORR eligible populations who continue to experience adverse economic impacts due to COVID-19.
* The RPB issued an ACDWL on May 3, 2021 providing counties with guidance.
* As a reminder, the waiver includes the following:
* Extend the eligibility period for clients who became eligible for Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) on or after April 1, 2019, with the additional months not extending beyond September 30, 2021.
* Flexibilities for eligibility determinations. For example, applicants can self-attest and will be granted additional time to submit the necessary documents.
* Refugee Support Services (RSS) base funding can be used for additional, immediate, and emergency services, such as transitional housing assistance and emergency payments to cover essential services such as utilities and housing, due to income loss from job disruption or job loss related to COVID-19.
* Extends the RSS eligibility period over 60 months.

Refugee Awareness Month

* The RPB is soliciting profiles/stories from current and former refugees to be posted and shared on the CDSS RAM website.
* The refugee profiles/stories may include where a family resettled from, how long they’ve been in the United States, their family’s resettlement experience, and how they are doing now.
* Video can also be submitted, which will be linked to the CDSS YouTube Channel. Some suggestions for video include:
  + Cooking demo of cultural dish and the significance
  + Attire and the cultural significance
  + Showcase a cultural dance, music, or other art
  + Lived experience and success in America

Operations

* The five-year San Diego Newcomer Project Plan was sent out to the appropriate stakeholders on May 3, 2021 for comments.  Comments are due to the RPB (Brian Tam) no later than May 31, 2021.

General Updates

* Several organizations have reach out to the RPB to discuss opening new Reception and Placement sites in CA.
* Site locations include non-impacted counties such as Fresno, Butte, San Bernardino, and Sutter.
* The Presidential Determination was increased to 62,500 refugees for the rest of Federal Fiscal Year 2021 (up from 15,000).
* The number and allocation of the refugees to be admitted pursuant to the proposed revised Presidential Determination are as follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Region** | **Proposed FY 2021 Allocation** |
| Africa | 22,000 |
| East Asia | 6,000 |
| Europe and Central Asia | 4,000 |
| Latin America/Caribbean | 5,000 |
| Near East/South Asia | 13,000 |
| Unallocated Reserve | 12,500 |
| **Total** | **62,500** |

Brian also said that with four months to go, refugee admissions for this fiscal year may not reach the 62,500 total.

California totals from October to April 30: resettled 1,188, with 355 refugees and 833 SIVs.

*FYI for those not familiar with this:*

About the Refugee Programs Bureau

The Refugee Programs Bureau (RPB) on behalf of the California Department of Social Services provides statewide administration of California's Refugee Resettlement Program and the Cuban/Haitian Entrant Program within pertinent federal guidelines, funding constraints and the State Plan. The RPB has responsibility for managing and coordinating the delivery of benefits and services to the refugee and entrant populations of California in partnership with counties and local refugee service providers. The RPB also has oversight responsibility for the Repatriation Program, Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program, Refugee School Impact Grant, Older Refugee Discretionary Grant and the Trafficking and Crime Victims Assistance Program.

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

Advocacy

Clint Carney reported:

- This task force has only one member so far. It is an important group in that refugees should have a strong voice in a number of vital issues. He urges Forum participants to join.

- He suggests a presentation on advocacy issues at a future Refugee Forum meeting.

- He notes that there is no Housing Task Force and feels this is another relevant context for the refugee community that the Forum could address.

Asylum

Alexis Burnstan reported:

- Three meetings have been held, with the next on June 10 at 2pm. She discussed the desire to connect with other task forces, would like to know when other task force meetings are.

- The TF is considering how to give asylum seekers information about services; a service directory on information is needed. Does anyone know of one out there?

- They Asylum TF wants to connect with resettlement agencies to discuss how ATF can get information on asylum seeker arrivals.

- Idea for World Refugee Day – to educate the community on the difference between asylum seekers , refugees and asylees.

Casey Myers: Asylum work happens on both sides of the US/Mexico border. It’s good to know what’s going on. There are 2000+ asylum seekers at the border. Some are not currently able to apply for asylum but apply for parole, apply to work with attorneys. So they can come over, so they can get services while they’re waiting. Only 10% are staying in San Diego.

Domestic Violence

Dalia Mohammad of License to Freedom reported:

- May 12 meeting. Their goals on recruitment include getting more community law enforcement involved, getting more information on hate crimes, on how to access resources. They want focus groups, dialogue with community, a way for them to get word out. Asks for more volunteers for the TF.

- Contact dalia.bapeer@gmail.com to join the DV task force

From Afrah Abdulkhadir: Suggest to meet with other Task forces, and as Dalia mentioned have an updated service map in different languages for survivors of crime specifically DV, SA & Human Trafficking. Please if you have any questions or concerns to reach out to DV Task Force, thank you Dalia for adding your email and here is also my email: Afrah.abdulkader@rescue.org

- Reach out to IRC Asylum Seeker Team and case managers, Asylum Seekers and Families (ASF) Program.

Education

Amanda Urena reported.

- They are involving parents and students in the TF. They want to get more collaboration from refugee youth.

- Next meeting is June 14. Contact Claire Arias-Kassir, carias@sandi.net for next meeting information and Zoom link.

Employment

Carol Crisp reported:

- Four people in this group. They have met twice.

- Discussed a possible survey of clients to identify their basic needs (such as transportation, healthcare, childcare) and employment/career interests and background. Renee Nasori wants to use tools from Grossmont College to put out this survey. They want to present survey results to the forum next meeting.

- They want more members. Connect with Carol Crisp-ccrisp@pcgus.com .

- Would like to partner with the Education TF.

Health

Jamie Schroer Culbert reported this group has been inactive since COVID, needs more members. If you are interested in co-chairing the Health Task Force, please reach out to me Jamie.schroer@sdcounty.ca.gov

Mental Health

This new task force is just getting started. Write in if you’re interested in joining.

WRD

Elizabeth Jackson reported a meeting was held with Abdi, Lucy Jasso regarding what type of event to have – virtual or in-person. This group badly needs more volunteers. Send email to Abdi. World Refugee Day is Sunday, June 20.

**5. Presentation 1:**  We All We Got Mutual Aid Organization Christina Griffin-Jones

This organization recognizes the differences and disparities in the population at large and focuses on assisting people at the margins, such as those with disabilities, the incarcerated, those who are not served in times of difficulty. WAWG does not work with ICE, the jail system, border control agencies, etc. in view of violence done to the community. They talk to people who have been harmed by the state, to create something new in San Diego County, to put lessons learned into practice. They are here to provide community support, allowing people to determine what they need and what’s right for them.

Christina talked about her personal experiences and difficulties in coping with life. She acknowledges it’s hard for people to ask for help. They help people feel less ashamed bout their economic conditions, and help in the way we would like to be helped.

They are currently raising money to help in the pandemic and ongoing crisis.

**Presentation 2:**  Majdal: Arab Community Center of San Diego Yasmeen Obeid, Ramah Awad

The Majdal Center is a resource and community center for Arab refugees, immigrants, and resident in San Diego. It is located in El Cajon and works with Syrian, Iraqi and Palestinian refugees and new immigrants. It opened in 2018 at the time Syrian refugees were coming in and were in need of assistance.

The Majdal Community Center seeks to empower all members of the Arab community in San Diego. Through campaigning, advocacy, and cultural programming, our mission is to uplift Arab youth, workers, families, and elders in their pursuits and to support them in overcoming whatever social, economic, and political challenges they may face.

Their work areas are:

1. Youth education and leadership

- volunteer programs involving 25 community members

- tutoring program, 20 students

- youth mentorship, 15 newcomer girls

- youth leadership council

- Arab Studies and resource campaign

2. Community health and well-being

- COVID-19 response: prevention, testing, vaccination

- COVID-19 Refugee Impact Report

- mutual aid and rental assistance referral

- resource support and navigation

- mental health

3. Newcomer support

- case management

- legal support

- housing support

They support translation of documents into Arabic.

They call clients with applications about how to apply for employment.

They connect clients with resources on immigration, domestic violence.

They connect people to resources regarding their housing needs.

4. Advocacy and policy

- supported Census 2020, 300+ families

- engage in redistricting process of electoral districts in El Cajon and County

- housing policies: issues around eviction moratorium

See also Majdal Annual Report on their website, https://majdalcenter.org/ .

Their staff are volunteers. A lot of their work is connecting people to services, which they don’t provide on their own. They would like to be connected to Arabic-speaking staff at other agencies and organizations. They are looking for support for their organization’s work.

Contact us at majdalcenter@gmail.com / ramah@majdalcenter.org

**6. Community Announcements**

Dalia Mohammad, License to Freedom

LTF held a vaccination clinic and had 55 people vaccinated. Contact LTF if you need help in lining up vaccination.

Tania Rivera, IRC

- Emergency fund in East County. Rental assistance, questions about eligibility. IRC can help.

- Work training to start May 24.

Brian Tam, CDSS Refugee Programs Bureau

Please feel free to call me directly if you have any questions regarding Refugee Awareness Month story and/or video submissions. 916 2157060

Jacqueline Hom, CA DSS

For information on other CA refugee forums:

State Refugee Forum Seat

Nahla Kayali, Executive Director

Access California Services

E-mail: nkayali@accesscal.org

Afrah Abdulkader, IRC

- Reach out to IRC Asylum Seeker Team and case managers, Asylum Seekers and Families (ASF) Program

- Suggest to meet with other Task forces, and as Dalia mentioned have an updated service map in different languages for survivors of crime specifically DV, SA & Human Trafficking. Please if you have any questions or concerns to reach out to DV Task Force, thank you Dalia for adding your email and here is also my email: [Afrah.abdulkader@rescue.org](mailto:Afrah.abdulkader@rescue.org)

- Majdal center, please connect with IRC Youth Program: moones.mansouri@rescue.org, anna glassey: [anna.glassey@rescue.org](mailto:anna.glassey@rescue.org). Also asking about support groups for Palestinian cause.

- If you need to know more about my program Safety & Wellness Unit at International Rescue Committee (IRC)- please email me I am a Survivor Advocate: Afrah.abdulkader@rescue.org

[Nadia.Binderup@sdsheriff.org](mailto:Nadia.Binderup@sdsheriff.org)

I'd be happy to explore with you on how the sheriff's dept can assist.

Officer Homayoun Nabizadeh

I am interested is doing an old fashioned Job Fair geared toward our refugees in City Heights.

Alexis Burnstan, UCSD TASET

If your organization assists asylum seekers and is not already on AsylumConnect (looks like there are only 4!), please consider adding your organization to the list https://catalog.asylumconnect.org/en\_US/search/California/San%20Diego%2C%20CA%2C%20USA/32.715738%2C-117.1610838/national/any/all/best

Claire Enemark, SDRCC/UWEAST

SDRCC & UWEAST’s Crisis Counseling is currently developing support groups for Palestinians. I will bring an update to next month’s meeting.

Elizabeth Jackson, The B.R.I.D.G.E. Projectejackson@abetterlifetogether.org 619.832.5990Check out our events page:https://www.abetterlifetogether.org/eventFollow and like us online:https://www.facebook.com/ABLTInchttps://twitter.com/ABetterLifeTog2

https://www.instagram.com/ablifet/

https://www.linkedin.com/company/abltinc

Tania Rivera, IRC

IRC Announcement: The Manufacturing Works Certification Training Program starts May 24. It’s free and it provides tools to Refugee and SIVs who are 18+ to start a career in the Manufacturing sector. For more information, Email: SD.CareerPrograms@rescue.org Text/Call: + 619 752-4764.

Brett Hall, CHIP/SPC

SPC Priority Populations & Communities Subcommittee Meeting, Thursday, 5/20 from 1:00-2:30pm.

SPC Monthly Meeting, Tuesday, 5/25 from 10:00-11:30am. Zoom link: https://zoom.us/j/92317218306?pwd=OFYrcmo1RVQ5RDdhZzVtbzM2VUhZUT09Meeting ID: 923 1721 8306Passcode: spc2021For 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.

Ramah Awad, Majdal Center

Palestinian Youth Movement is leading a protest today 5/18 at the Federal Building at 4pm for those who can make it and would like to learn more: https://www.facebook.com/events/2912875748992287

Mejgan Afshan, Borderlands for Equity

Black, Indigenous, and Palestinian Feminisms and the link is https://bit.ly/bipfeminisms

Begins at 8pm tonight 5/18.

Renee Nasori, Grossmont College Career Services

Virtual employer event 5/18: Employer and Community Partner Event: https://tinyurl.com/CTEEmployers

**7. Approval of the minutes of the April 20 meeting** Bob Walsh, Secretary

**Adjournment** Ross Fackrell, Vice Chair, 12:00 p.m.

**Next Meeting**: June 15, 2021

Minutes recorded by Bob Walsh, Secretary