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

Date: Tuesday, October 19, 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 |
| Ailaa Al-Tabatabaee, Somali Family Service |
| Alexis Burnstan, UCSD TASET Project |
| Amanda Urena, SD Unified School District |
| Angie Esparza, SAY San Diego |
| Ann Vilmenay, COSD-HHSA-BHS-AOA |
| Anne Fosselman, El Cajon Valley HS Community Center |
| Avonne Pace, A Better Life Together BRIDGE Project |
| BBBS of SDC |
| Becky Moreno-Estrada, FBI Victim Specialist |
| Bethlehem Wolkeba, JFS Breaking Down Barriers |
| Bill Sutton, Catholic Charities Employment Specialist |
| Bob Walsh, SDRF Secretary |
| Brett Hall, CHIP Comm. Health Improvement Program |
| Brittney Ochira, National Conflict Resolution Center |
| Carmen Kcomt, La Maestra Community Health Centers |
| Carol Crisp, PCG |
| Carol Lewis, El Cajon Collaborative |
| Casey Myers Doane, One Digital World |
| Chef Eddie, UPAC |
| Christina Kaufmann, One Digital World ESL teacher |
| Claire Riley, County Behavioral Health Services, Adult |
| Claudia Mercado, Alpine UHSD |
| Crystal Felix, ABA Immigration Justice Project |
| Cynthia To, SD County Community Health |
| Dalia Mohammad, License to Freedom |
| Damaris Garduno, Miramar College CalWORKS |
| Daria Tomsky, IRC Youth Program |
| Dorcus Bangenyi, Somali Family Service, Comm Health Worker |
| Dulce Vega |
| Elissa Hill, Somali Family Service |
| Emily Stocking, SAY San Diego |
| Farhat Popal, City SD Immigrant Affairs Mgr |
| Faten Khalaf |
| Giselle Barajas, Jewish Family Service, Resettlement |
| Graciela Mendoza, CA Dept of Public Health, Binational Border Health |
| Hassan Abdirahman., Somali Family Service |
| Hawi Abdulkadir, Somali Family Service |
| Ismael Avilez, Casa Cornelia Law Center |
| Jan Jarrell, SD College of Continuing Ed |
| Jane Arena, County Child Welfare Services |
| Jane Hoey, Women's Empowerment Intl |
| Jane Le, Rep. Jacobs office |
| Jane Register, World Relief SoCal |
| Jennifer Paasch, County Child Welfare Services |
| Jessica Hernandez, East Region Adult Ed |
| Judy Amaro, PCG |
| Justine Kozo, County Office of Border Health |
| Kalid Ibrahim |
| Kate Morrissey, SD Union Tribune |
| Kathryn LaPointe, Oasis |
| Leanne Carroll, CA Dept of Public Health, Binational Border Health |
| Lily Mojdehi, Breaking Down Barriers, Jewish Family Service |
| Lucia Gonzales, SAY San Diego, Crawford |
| Lucy Jasso, San Diego Youth Services |
| Madison Bjork |
| Maggie Santibanez, County of SD |
| Marwah Alobaidi, USAHello |
| Mary Joy Cunningham, IRC MSW Intern |
| Maureen Hartin, Volunteers in Medicine |
| Melissa Casanova, Home Start, First 5 First Steps |
| Melissa Lindo, UPAC Teen Recovery Center |
| Nadia |
| Nazira Adieva, County Office of Equitable Communities CAP |
| Neil Hovland, SD Unified School District Family Engagement |
| Officer Homayoun Nabizadeh, SDPD Comm. Relations |
| Olivia Arizmendi, CA Dept of Public Health, Binational Border Health |
| Osvaldo Alcazar Pulido, United Health Care |
| Prisci Quijada, Refugee Health Coordinator, SDCHHS |
| Rahmo Abdi, PANA |
| Renee Nasori, Grossmont College |
| Ross Fackrell, IRC, SDRF Vice Chair |
| Ryan Dorey, Family Health Centers |
| Sadia Yusuf, Somali Family Service, Comm Health Worker |
| Shamail Ameri |
| Shlyn Guarian, SD County Child Welfare Services, Community Outreach |
| Swabaha Al-bahsan |
| Tammy Burmeister, Child Welfare Services, East |
| Tania Rivera, IRC Emergency Resources Coordinator |
| Tanya Garcia, Alpine UHSD |
| Troy Elder, Episcopal Diocese SD |

**Meeting facilitator**: Ross Fackrell, SDRF Vice Chair

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

81 attending, including 28 new in 2021

**2. Treasurer’s report** Ross Fackrell, SDRF Vice Chair

With the recent changes to the officer team, it has been hard to get access to the Forum’s financials. When Ross has been able to get in touch with the credit union, he will be able to put together and send out the required annual financial report for the Forum.

Paid Forum membership for this year stands at 26. Your support is meaningful, providing funds for task force activities and for the annual World Refugee Day event. The Forum serves not only refugees but asylees and asylum seekers and is relevant to a range of organizations.

Fees are $35 for individuals and small ethnic community-based organizations and $70 for all larger organizations. There are currently 23 paid members. Inquiries from several other agencies are being addressed.

Members have priority in giving presentations and can promote their organization in this way. Only paid members can vote in officer elections.

To join, go to the Forum website http://www.sdrefugeeforum.org/members.html You can pay with PayPal, but you don’t need a PayPal account to do so. Specify whether membership is for an organization or an individual. Membership dues are $35/year for individuals and small ECBOs and $70 for other agencies and organizations. Thanks to all for their dedication in serving the community.

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

County Refugee Coordinator report

Fiscal year 2020-2021 ended September 30. A total of 1,920 individuals were resettled in San Diego County. Of these 1,257 were Haitians. There were 420 Afghans, primarily SIV and refugees.

Top arrivals for the year: Haiti 65%, Afghanistan 22%, Cuba 3%, other countries 9%.

In September, total 405 arrivals. 243 Haitians. 76 Afghans – 22 SIV, 28 Humanitarian Parole, 26 refugees. In addition, there were 35 Syrians and 27 Iraqis, including 11 SIV. 24 from 7 other countries.

Of the 405, 292 were in families with children, 113 were single adults or couples with no children.

For more details, see the County Arrivals Report for September 2021 uploaded on the SDRF website.

For this coming year, 3,215 refugees and asylees are projected for San Diego.

Special Afghan arrivals:

75,000 Afghans have arrived in the US so far. 65,000 are currently on US bases.

5,255 are expected to come to California, including at least 1,300 to San Diego. San Diego could get about 1/3 of the state total. The numbers could be higher.

Resettlement agency reports

Alliance for African Assistance – not in attendance

Catholic Charities – Bill Sutton

For September, 272 arrivals. Of these, 248 were Haitians and Cubans. 16 primary refugees. Afghan SIV: 63 cases with 200 people.

Jewish Family Service – Giselle Barajas

September: 40 individuals: 14 Afghan SIV, 6 Humanitarian Parole, remainder from other countries

October: expecting 16 families Afghan Humanitarian Parole

IRC – Ross Fackrell

September: 52 refugee arrivals from Iraq, Syria, El Salvador.

October: 6 primary refugees from Iraq.

The big news is the arrivals from the Afghan Placement Program. From October 1 to October 18, there have been 103 arrivals.

**4. SDRF election update**

In the officer election now under way, all four officer seats are open: Chair, Vice chair, Secretary and Treasurer. See the SDRF Bylaws for details on officer duties, responsibilities and expectations. <http://www.sdrefugeeforum.org/bylaws.html>

Candidates are drawn from nominations submitted by the general Forum. Nomination forms were sent out last week with the election announcement and election guidelines. Please nominate suitable candidates. All are eligible to run except previous officers who were dismissed from office. Officers are required to be paid members of the Forum. People who are not members can be nominated, but they would need to pay their 2021 membership in order to be placed on the ballot. The deadline for receiving nominations is Friday, October 29.

Only paid members are allowed to vote in the election. The deadline to become a paid member for 2021 and vote is Friday, November 5. Note that individuals will get one vote, all organizations will get two votes.

Many thanks to the Election Committee for volunteering to help. They will be receiving and processing nominations as they come in. From these they will prepare the election ballots. Completed ballots should be returned by Monday, November 15 so that votes can be tallied and the results presented at the general meeting on Tuesday, November 16.

**5. Task force updates** Bob Walsh, SDRF Secretary

Asylum

The Asylum Task Force will be the main presenter for today’s meeting.

Domestic Violence

Dalia Mohammad reported:

The DVTF meeting on October 6 will focus on preparations for Afghan arrivals.

License to Freedom has resources in Afghan languages.

Education

Amanda Urena reported:

The latest Education Task Force meeting featured Roberta Krauss [rkrauss@sdccd.edu](mailto:rkrauss@sdccd.edu) ,  Education Director of CalWORKs at San Diego College of Continuing Education. Roberta described this program:

<https://sdcce.edu/services/calworks>

* The CalWORKs Believe Program offers support services to students who receive cash aid and are a parent (with child(ren) under 18 years old, must be enrolled at SDCCE.
* Case management support services include assigned coordinators and advocates, academic and career counseling, paid work study and career services, and assistance with reimbursement requests for education and work study costs
* Parent must complete a certain number of academic hours weekly depending on the age of their child and couple or single parent
* Can enroll at any campus
* After enrolling at SDCCE, eligible parents can complete an Online CalWORKs Intake Application (Available in Multiple Languages)
* For on-site supports students need to be COVID vaccinated , or show proof of a negative COVID test in the last 7 days

See more details in the SDRF October Task Force report.

Employment

Carol Crisp reported:

- The big event is coming soon – the Grossmont College Virtual Job Fair, Wednesday, Oct. 27. Lots of employers are registered. They are open to the ESL population. Flyers will be sent out again.

- The task force is growing, has two new members, Rayan Kaskos and Adeem Ismaeil of IRC. More refugee focused events are being considered.

Health

Cynthia To reported:

- Work is progressing on updating the Medi-cal Managed Care Map.

- The group is looking for a new co-chair.

- The group is discussing how to better help the needs and concerns of refugees

Please contact Cynthia.to@sdcounty.ca.gov if interested in attending.

Mental Health

Brett Hall reported:

Work is progressing on putting together a map of mental health providers who can serve the refugee population.

**6. Presentation: Asylum, Asylees, Asylum Seekers** SDRF Asylum Task Force

Clint Carney of the Asylum Task Force opened the presentation, which featured speakers Crystal Felix of the American Bar Association Immigration Justice Project and task force members Casey Myers Doane of One Digital World, Olivia Arizmendi of County Binational Health Office, and Alexis Burnstan of USCD TASET project.

Crystal Felix, Senior Staff Attorney, ABA Immigration Justice Project

The Immigration Justice Project provides legal advice to asylum seekers and non-citizens. And currently is mostly representing people detained at the Otay Mesa Detention Center, which houses up to 1,500 people.

Definitions of refugees, asylees and asylum seekers:

One of the main legal distinctions between refugees and asylum seekers is where they are. The Immigration and Nationality Act defines refugee as a person who is outside their country of nationality and who is unable or unwilling to return to that country because of persecution or a well-founded ear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

As for asylum: Any non-citizen who is physically present in the U.S. or who arrive in the U.S. … may apply for asylum… Asylum may be granted if it is determined that such noncitizen is a refugee…

Asylum seekers in this country are trying to prove status on the basis of problems they have or may face in their home country. They do not have an official status in the U.S.

Who can apply for asylum? Anyone who is physically present or who arrives in the US.

Refugees have gone through a process outside of the U.S. to determine their status as refugees, asylum seekers are here trying to prove they are refugees and have no status, and asylees have been granted asylum and have official status.

There are two ways to claim asylum: affirmative and defensive.

An adult who is present in the US who is not already in removal proceedings may file an application for asylum with USCIS. If approved, they become an asylee. If they are denied but are lawfully here, they must leave the US when their status expires. If they are not lawfully present and are denied, they are referred to the immigration court.

A person seeking asylum would file an asylum application and later attend an asylum interview, the wait for a decision on the application.

One problem for those coming across the border is that people are often separated, and this splits up the evidence they may be carrying.

COVID has held everything up in terms of the asylum process.

Eligibility for benefits for asylum seekers:

They are not eligible for employment training and placement, housing, or cash assistance while they are waiting for a decision on their case. It is possible for them to get an Employment Authorization Document, but only if their application has been pending for longer than one year.

Eligibility for benefits for asylees:

- admission of spouse/children

- termination of pending removal proceedings

- refugee cash assistance

- some case management and employment services

- Medicaid or other medical assistance

- refugee support services for up to 5 years

Asylees have similar benefits to refugees, though they are in different categories. Asylum seekers can get work permission but after one year They are provided no financial resources.

Asylum seekers are entitled to an attorney, but most don’t have one.

Casey Myers Doane, One Digital World

Casey has been working with asylum seekers in Mexico. She first worked in Lesbos, Greece with migrants trying to reach EU countries. She founded her organization to focus on equipping this population with basic computer skills. To empower refugees through technology.

She pointed out that refugee women in particular face issues around language, culture, money, skills, and support.

They work with three agencies in Mexico, set up classes in shelters, teach digital literacy skills. Also ESL classes, as the language of the Internet is largely English. And online, teachers from all over the world can participate. They also partner with the California Office of Binational Border Health.

They did focus groups inside their labs to interview people in the shelters to see what kinds of services they would need in the US.

Most students have no high school diploma, only elementary school. They can earn certificates and build a portfolio for employment.

The program is working toward facilitating remote access to asylum seekers in different countries, including Afghans trying to apply for Humanitarian Parole.

For any further questions or connections you can email Casey directly at casey@onedigitalworld.net and visit our website [www.onedigitalworld.net](http://www.onedigitalworld.net)

Olivia Arizmendi, California Dept. of Public Health, Office of Binational Border Health

Asylum seekers in the US do have access to health services, including medication. They can engage in prevention measures.

In California, the Asylum Seeker Health Services (ASHS) Pilot Project aims to connect asylum seekers with basic healthcare services, help them with Medi-Cal enrollment and to establish relationships with providers. In San Diego, the designated provider partner is Family Health Centers of San Diego, at multiple locations.

For assistance in arranging services for your clients or for more information, connect with Olivia or Graciela Mendoza -- Olivia.arizmendi@cdph.ca.gov and Graciela.mendoza@cdph.ca.gov

Alexis Burnstan, UCSD TASET Project

This is Tracing Asylum-Seeker’s Experience & Trajectories (TASET). They interview asylum seekers and collect data. Studying a crisis within a crisis – a humanitarian crisis within a pandemic. Asylum seekers in Tijuana – hard to find safe housing, difficult to get medicine. Migrants’ health problems can negatively affect their reception at the border.

<https://cgmh.ucsd.edu/research/research-project/north%20america/three-column.html>

TASET is working on a survey of health and mental health, mapping clinics, identifying services and providers for asylum seekers.

https://forms.gle/CFEC9nuj7qE54HF69

Event this Friday and Saturday:

UC San Diego Global Health Institute presents a Conference on the Health and Well-Being of Refugees, Asylum Seekers, & Forcibly Displaced People.

Oct. 22 & 23, 2021 09:30 AM

https://ucsd.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\_tLFT6Sc0R9aqlIKut\_8KVw

**7. Community announcements**

Time was too tight for community announcements at the meeting. The following was compiled from notes in the meeting chat and other sources.

Amanda Urena, Education Task Force

Information on CalWORKs at San Diego College of Continuing Education

https://sdcce.edu/services/calworks#:~:text=CalWORKs%20at%20San%20Diego%20College,eligible%20for%20SDCCE's%20CalWORKs%20Program

Renee Nasori, Grossmont College

Career EXPO/Virtual Job Fair: Wednesday, October 27th from 11 AM to 2 PM: https://www.eventbrite.com/e/43rd-annual-career-expo-tickets-188657709287

Kate Morrissey, SD Union-Tribune reporter

See in-depth SDUT series on the asylum system: <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/immigration/story/2020-12-27/how-could-asylum-system-be-reimagined>

<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/returned>

Carmen Kcomt, La Maestra Clinic

We do have services for asylum seekers, please refer clients to me also for unaccompanied minors

I think is important to screen asylum seekers to find out if they may be victims of trafficking. I can do the screening for potential victims of trafficking , please send clients my way, ckcomt@lamaestra.org

Bethlehem Wolkeba, Jewish Family Service

Hello, I am the new Outreach Coordinator for the African/Refugee community with San Diego’s Jewish Family Service in the Breaking Down Barriers Outreach program. I am also a part of the Refugee Mental Health Task Force. The purpose of Breaking Down Barriers is to reduce mental health stigma in our communities through outreach and engagement and to provide resources to community members of underserved groups.

[bethlehemw@jfssd.org](mailto:bethlehemw@jfssd.org) | [www.jfssd.org](http://www.jfssd.org/)

**8. Approval of the minutes of the September 21 meeting** Bob Walsh, Secretary

The minutes were approved.

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

**Next Meeting**: November 16, 2021

Minutes recorded by Bob Walsh, Secretary