



Newsletter - December 2025

Welcome to our final missive of 2025

And what a year it's been, both nationally and globally. We have seen the flames of anti-migrant sentiment fanned by numerous actors and groups, with misinformation and 'rage-bait' oozing from social media platforms, with a parallel rise in aggression towards anyone perceived to be 'non-British', plus the galling appropriation of the St George Cross and Christian symbols as tribal identity markers of the far right. The wars in Ukraine and Gaza have been the focus of much attention but have barely eased. Civil wars in Sudan and Myanmar have also seen thousands killed with little sign of resolution. We have seen the continued dismantlement of the 'rules-based order' that was one positive to arise from the devastation of the Second World War, and this month in the US a new [National Security Strategy](#) made clear that the assumptions that have underpinned transatlantic strategy throughout that time are no longer relevant. The same document calls for the "restoration of 'Western identity'", claiming that Europe will be "unrecognisable in 20 years or less" because of the "stark prospect of civilisation erasure", and it also "encourages [] the growing influence of patriotic European parties" (ie far-right operations across Europe, notably the AfD in Germany and Reform in the UK). Such influence will inevitably increase anti-migrant negativity, and societies across Europe, including Britain, will become even more divided.

Disappointingly, what we have seen from our own government in its proposed **Asylum and Returns Policy**, currently under review, only amplifies the polarizing narrative around immigration. An outline of the proposed changes can be found [here](#), on a government website, and a table from Right to Remain comparing current and potential new rules, [here](#). The proposals have already led to huge anxiety among RAMA clients, and will introduce further insecurity and financial burdens and will turn already precarious lives upside-down. See page 5 for more. Having worked tirelessly to support individuals and to promote community cohesion in Colchester, we are dismayed at how damaging these proposals could turn out to be.

Sorry, none of this has brought any Christmas cheer! Let's be optimistic and hope the world is transformed again by the end of the year ahead. RAMA will continue striving towards that goal and we thank you, our wonderful supporters, for being on the journey with us.

We all join in wishing you a fabulous festive season and happiness to you and your families in 2026.



Operational Lead's report

You will all understand that our clients have been affected by the current climate, with increased tensions and anxiety. What you may not expect is that the rhetoric has also affected our funding: funders now require more evidence about how our work benefits the *wider* community – as though benefitting people seeking sanctuary was not enough.

While it's a shame that we have to do it, justifying our work is easy: we sit in the prevention space. The new NHS 10-year plan calls for increased prevention of health and mental health crises. Our work prevents overburdened police, social workers, councils, the health & mental health sector and voluntary partners having to work with our clients at crisis level: since we carefully manage client cases from initial registration on, crisis point is rarely reached.

Last year we saw 836 people with **no recourse to public funds** (NRPF). For the vast majority this was coupled with no right to work, no right to claim benefits, no free secondary healthcare and no legal aid. For those experiencing domestic abuse, there is also no access to a refuge or even the night shelter.

Nobody knows these clients exist. How could they? They pay no rent, no utilities, no tax; they are not registered to vote and claim no benefits. Local services are not qualified to offer support, and many have no funding for interpreters or translation. They cannot identify what immigration status people have and what rights accompany them. In every one of those 836 cases we assisted – helping people with destitution payments so they could stay with friends or family – before making immigration applications or lifts of the 'no recourse' condition. Clients were therefore able to escape abuse and potential exploitation. Without our input, the work of keeping Colchester as free as possible of modern slavery would be farcical.

Allow me to provide a few cases demonstrating the barriers these clients face.

One client (aged 83) is dying of motor neurone disease and cancer, seeking asylum and living in the Tendring facility with his wife (aged 80) who is unable to care for him. The hospital consultant called us and asked me not to tell her if he has no recourse to public funds as if so she would no longer be able to prescribe palliative care. As an asylum seeker he can access life-saving chemotherapy, but as soon as the care becomes palliative, he is no longer technically eligible, meaning he could die in agony.

Another referral was for a young, healthy woman dependent on her husband's work visa. She was pregnant on arrival, and while care for standard births is free, she had an emergency caesarean after complications so the hospital charged her £13,000. This terrified her, since the couple do not have the money to pay. Worse still, she now has a bad infection that the perinatal team fear will develop into sepsis if left untreated, but she is refusing to return for specialist help in case she is charged more. This same hospital has an overseas patient manager whose job it is to identify and charge people – with no leeway regarding their vulnerability or income – yet the cost of treating sepsis is far greater than any funds recouped from charges, and the cost for the family in terms of health and wellbeing is far more severe.

There are families newly granted refugee status placed in remote locations across Tendring and Colchester by London boroughs and even Chelmsford Council; often left there with no furniture, no crockery or cutlery and no white goods. Some have no English, and one recent arrival was a lone mother with seven children. Local services would not know about them and in any case have little capacity to support. Instead, it is RAMA that takes what action it can to remedy the situation. With local government and NHS restructuring well underway, further changes are inevitable. Our award-winning, forward-thinking SNEE-ICB (Suffolk & North East Essex Integrated Care Board) is losing its connection to Suffolk and joining two other Essex ICBs that are in debt. SNEE-ICB has been a great ally and respectful of the way we can reach communities they do not see. There are many good people within the system, but over 50% of staff will lose their jobs and currently there is no budget to manage the numbers needing redundancy.

In the same way that the Covid PPE scandal showed how there are always profits to be made from misery, many individuals profit from the way in which asylum seekers are treated. The constant negativity and 'othering' of marginalised groups is changing social attitudes. Recently we were told by NHS partners promoting EDI policies that staff participating in training had acknowledged that they would be professional when at work, but that these EDI principles did not align with their personal beliefs. Imagine: you attend a road traffic accident involving an asylum seeker, a black person and a blond, white person.... How do your personal beliefs not then affect your response? Instead of triaging for whose medical need is greater, other factors will be at play. EDI training is currently not fit for purpose; bombarding people with facts is not enough. To engage people and address the misinformation, we must have voices with lived experience so that true empathy is awakened.

You may not be aware that UK Immigration Enforcement has now added 'compliance' to their title, to create ICE (just like in the US) – and that 3 sets of people (that we know of) have been approached by them in the last few months. One family included a mum and adult daughter both working for a well-known and respected local care agency. Totally without warning, the door to their flat was broken down and they were handcuffed – in front of a 7- and a 10-year-old – and their passports confiscated. They were told the company had lost its sponsorship license and were given a 60-day notice to leave the country (difficult when passport's been taken!). In fact, the company in question retains a full sponsorship licence, as any of us could check with a quick Google search. Luckily our MP told the family to come to us and with her help we have been able to get the passports returned and the 60 days' notice overturned. NO apology though, no understanding that the mother is now in fear of leaving the house and the younger children are worried to go to school in case mum is not there when they return.

Without RAMA's intervention, the already high number of clients facing serious mental health issues would be even greater. Some of our clients are sectioned, and we have known them to be subsequently discharged to homelessness and destitution without appropriate support. Now we work with the discharge teams to prevent this. Dismayingly, the current circumscribing of refugee rights will change the goalposts again and risks undoing much of the work we have done with partners in recent years.

MW



Welcome to the newest members of the Immigration Team (part 1): Kubra

I am pleased to introduce myself as part of the Immigration Team at RAMA. My journey in law began with an LLB from the University of London (distance learning), followed by two years of legal experience in Pakistan. In 2021, I moved to the UK to pursue the Bar-at-Law and an MA, with a clear vision of the career I wanted to build.

My interest in immigration law took a personal turn when I received incorrect advice regarding my own Graduate Route eligibility – an error that almost derailed my future. Instead of accepting it, I conducted my own research, challenged the misinformation, and realised how quickly a single piece of poor advice can set someone back. After completing my postgraduate studies, I secured an internship in London, relocated with no guarantee of a permanent position and within two months was offered a full-time role. Seven months later I had obtained my Level 1 IAA accreditation, quickly followed by Level 2.

Although I had initially intended to specialise in criminal law, my work in immigration revealed the significant impact of accurate, well-informed legal guidance. I work with migrants who unintentionally lose their status through misunderstanding the law, and with refugees seeking protection while managing economic hardship and emotional strain. Seeing the difference my work makes both practically and personally has intensified my commitment to this field.

Alongside, I teach (online) students on the Bar Practice Course in Criminal Litigation, Civil Litigation, Advocacy, Conference Skills, and Drafting. Teaching not only strengthens my command of the law but keeps me closely connected to my studies and to areas of law beyond immigration. It allows me to continuously refine my analytical skills while passing on my passion for the legal profession to future advocates. Guiding students through complex concepts, while helping them build confidence in their own abilities, adds depth to my practice and reinforces the discipline and precision that define my work.

Every stage of my journey – from international human rights moots to overcoming immigration challenges of my own – has reinforced my belief in the transformative power of accurate legal guidance. I bring that conviction, along with a strong academic foundation and unwavering determination, to my work at RAMA.

KI



The Pamoja Project round up

As the Pamoja Project (our mental health and wellbeing programme) draws to an end, here are some interesting figures:

Total Attendance (e.g. 1 adult attending 4 sessions = 4): **5032**

Unique Attendance (e.g. 1 adult attending 4 sessions = 1): **1770**



We provided psychosocial sessions and support to **318** unique individuals in Clacton, Harwich and Colchester.

The team organised a total of 167 unique sessions with these clients.

'Pamojans' came from a staggering **35** different countries, with high frequencies from Sudan, Iran and Pakistan.

We provided a structured programme to **215** men, women, and children. Of these, **56.7%** were asylum-seeking individuals, **11.2%** refugees, **7%** have leave to remain, and **21.4%** UK residents (only in Harwich).

We certified **15** community members as Mental Health First Aiders, **16** as Suicide First Aiders, and **49** with Mind's Mental Health toolkit. Overall, Pamoja provided over **42** hours of formal Mental Health Training to professionals.

We co-produced with approximately **20** different organisations in Clacton, **23** in Harwich and **26** in Colchester.

We cut well over **100** people's hair and estimate that we served **2,505** cups of tea

Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with **72%** of clients rating us as excellent and **28%** as good!

Feedback from Professionals (this is just a TINY snippet of feedback!)

"The level of tireless dedication and sheer enthusiasm you brought to improving the wellbeing of your participants was contagious and truly set Pamoja apart."

"The knowledge and practical tools I gained are already making a difference in both my professional and personal life. Your hard work has left a real, lasting impact, and I'm incredibly proud and grateful for everything you've accomplished."

Barber: *"Pamoja was one of the greatest projects I have ever experienced. They supported us mentally through activities such as yoga and other group sessions. Sitting together around a table and sharing lunch made us feel like one big family."*



Pamoja celebrations in Clacton

From Clients (again, a tiny tiny snippet)

"Pamoja is a community, and to me, community is strong interpersonal relationships. It means family. Pamoja has been my family. It is my family."

"One to ten, I would give you guys a ten! I felt good, I felt appreciated. I found my voice in Pamoja. After my experience arriving in the UK, I felt that I had lost my voice. But in Pamoja, I was able to express how I feel openly and give my opinion. And I felt good. It made me want to do my part to help. I think that's what I really noticed the most after a few months of Pamoja – I felt more confident, and more confident in using my voice."

Translated from Turkish: *"We have a saying in my country: 'Together, we become stronger' and I felt that being part of this group"*.

JW & SF



The Pamoja Project and Afiuk at Firstsite

Colchester Library is open!

We were delighted to attend the official ceremony in the company of other long-standing partners from around Colchester. Aside from the speeches (including from our own patron, right) and the ribbon-cutting by Councillor Mark Durham, we were entertained by Gosbecks school choir and with witty words, limericks and poetry from John Cooper Clarke and Alice d'Lumiere.

There has been much work to transform this into a hub for the future; do pay a visit to the busiest library in Essex!



Asylum and Immigration Proposals

Last month, Shabana Mahmood presented to Parliament the most radical changes to the UK asylum and immigration system since the Second World War. Couched with the laudable aims of promoting fairness and community cohesion, draining the swamp of far-right race baiting by the likes of Reform UK and so preventing immigration becoming the most salient issue at the next General Election, the core proposals in Ms Mahmood's document *Restoring Order and Control* are:

The end of permanent protection for refugees. Currently refugees in the UK receive a five-year initial period of leave. It is proposed to make refugee status temporary and to review it.

To escalate the removal of families, including children, whose asylum claims have been refused.

To axe the legal requirement to support destitute asylum seekers. This will be replaced by a discretionary power to offer support, as previously provided under UK law. Support will be denied to those who have the right to work, a category which includes entrants who come on work or student visas before claiming asylum. Those working illegally, who commit crimes and who do not comply with deportation, will likewise no longer receive support.

A plan to introduce a new definition of 'family' to curb claims from extended families. On Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, the UK government is promising to legislate to make sure the [right to family life](#) only applies to immediate family.¹

These proposals have been supplemented by proposals out to consultation on the eligibility of migrants to the receipt of welfare benefits. Under [these](#), people who migrate to the UK will be eligible for benefits and social housing only when they become British citizens rather than being granted settlement on arrival in the UK as is currently the case.² Those who arrive by small boat could have to wait up to 30 years for residency.

The plan for 'earned' settlement and doubling the wait time before eligibility for long-term status was announced in the Government's White Paper on Immigration. Arrivals will now be able to apply for indefinite Leave To Remain (LTR) after 10 years instead of 5 years as currently. Residents may qualify for resettlement through the much faster lane of a new contribution-based model, such as volunteering in the local community, having A-level standard English and not being on benefits.³

More than 600,000 people and family members who arrived on health and care worker visas will be eligible for settlement after 15 years, under the new plans. If anyone on these visas, or their dependents, have claimed state benefits for a year and more, this would increase to 25 years. Visa overstayers and those arriving in small boats or lorries will have to wait for up to 30 years to settle. Doctors and nurses working in the NHS can settle after five years while high earners and entrepreneurs will be able to settle after three years.⁴

The Home Secretary hopes that these policies will curb bogus asylum seekers and cut the numbers of people attempting to cross the English Channel in vessels that have entered the lexicon of national threat, namely 'small boats'. But, based as they are on the Danish migration model promulgated by Denmark's Social Democratic government in 2019 with its Net Zero asylum target, they have unleashed a storm of protest amongst refugee advocacy organisations like RAMA and some Labour backbench MPs among whom the clamour will hopefully grow during its journey through Parliament.

By increasing by decades the periods for application for UK citizenship and rights to remain, and by preventing family unions for so many categories of migrants, this Labour government seems determined to replicate former Home Secretary Theresa May's 'hostile environment' for refugees which created the conditions for the Windrush Scandal. And in relation to the Caribbean, the Home Office is continuing with the policies that have fractured generations of families. Take the [case](#) of eight-year-old Lati-Yana Stephanie Brown, left destitute in Jamaica after the devastation of Hurricane Melissa in late October. But after her UK-resident parents appealed for the Home Office to speed up her visa application, officials rejected it and Lari-Yana has been left to sleep on the floor of her elderly grandmother's destroyed home.⁵

¹ Guardian, 18th November 2025

² Rajeev Syal *Migrants must be UK citizens before getting benefits, says Mahmood* The Guardian, 20th November 2025 p.16

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Nadine White *Whitehall is still tearing Caribbean families apart* Guardian Opinion 2 December 2025 p.3

Yet this rejection was based on factual errors, according to Lati-Yana's mother, Kerrian Bigby. Correspondence with Dawn Butler, her MP, raised concerns about 'misrepresentations' in the decision notice, including the claim that Bigby does not have full parental responsibility, which she says is false. The doubling down by the Home Office on this decision speaks to the historical truth and reality that Britain's immigration system routinely separates children from their parents with little regard for the trauma that follows in its wake.⁶

In Caribbean history, family separation was built into the slavery system and by the effects of the 1971 Immigration Act which made it harder for 'New' Commonwealth citizens to enter the UK. The intergenerational scars caused by the leaving behind of thousands in the Caribbean including the 'barrel children', sustained by love yet carrying the weight of separation, have lasted to this day. The author Nadine White relates how her father never came to terms with his separation from his parents right up to his death at the age of 49.⁷

The draconian restrictions placed on the right to claim LTR proposed by the Home Secretary conjure all sorts of appalling vistas like Windrush. Rejected asylum applicants and those currently on short- to medium-term LTR face being returned to countries, be they Ukraine, Syria, Eritrea etc, which may be deemed safe by the Home Office but about which legitimate fears remain, whether of persecution (eg homophobic laws in states like Uganda) or of military conscription. The children of these newly vulnerable migrants face being torn away from settled educational and social networks.

Immigration enforcement officials will have the right, in their quest to access useful intelligence about people smugglers, [to search children](#) who arrive in the UK on small boats to check if they are concealing phone SIM cards in their mouths, under new Home Office rules which are part of the Border, Asylum and Immigration Bill that received royal assent this month.⁸

It is scarcely possible to imagine such retraumatising scenarios, but such is the dystopia that may come to pass on Planet Shabana.

Barry Gilheany (volunteer)

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Diane Taylor & Rajeev Syal *Children who may arrive on small boats may face mouth search for SIM cards* The Guardian 2 December 2025 p.11

With thanks to volunteer Diego for these much enjoyed movement sessions for clients.



Who doesn't love a **selection box** at Christmas?!

Pictured are some of the happy recipients of our current festive chocolate giveaway—children *and* mothers!



The initiative came from generous supporters Craig Smallbone and Kelly McDonald who have already donated funds and the proceeds of a house clearance to RAMA, and wanted to do something nice for our clients' children at Christmas. With a further donation from them we were able to buy a mountain of boxes to delight so many who struggle to afford treats for their families at this time of year. A big thank you from all of us!

...And of course there is always time for a celebration: this time a significant birthday for Operational Lead Maria.



A word from the immigration team

As I look back on this year, a quote from the American civil rights leader Ella Baker stands out to me: "We who believe in freedom cannot rest until [it comes]". This strikes a chord because not only do we fight for freedom, and see lives changed along the way, but because this year particularly we have been unable to rest. A few months ago, the legal and complex casework team comprised two people, with an extreme backlog of cases, working late into the night to meet demand. Now we have expanded to seven members of staff. This 350% increase has come with its own challenges, but where we once had one person doing the work of 4 people, we now have 4 people doing the work of 4 people, which is a much better arrangement.

We have also levelled up in terms of our qualifications. When I started at RAMA, we had only one colleague certified to IAA (Immigration Advice Authority) Level 1. Now we have an additional Level 1 (with two more to qualify soon), 2 Level 2s, and 1 Level 3 (with two more to qualify soon). This means we are now qualified to help clients with a significantly enlarged range of applications and legal support, for which we are incredibly thankful. Up to now we were having to limit our priorities further and further. Firstly we had to set aside situations that were not desperate; then came the difficult point when we were considering setting aside cases that were desperate but just too time-consuming for us. So this larger team means we can continue to take on those cases without turning anyone away. Our department has further been strengthened this year as a result of partnerships with organisations such as Gyros Immigration in Suffolk, ILPA (Immigration Law Practitioners' Association), national Refugee Action, and Free Movement.

It would be relevant here to mention the time and effort involved in our cases and some of the difficulties we face. A major issue this year has been clients coming to us for help at the eleventh hour, usually when their leave to remain is about to expire. Often they have already started an application, but on examination we find it's a complete and utter disaster and we only have a few days to sort it out. In many cases the client's leave to remain in the UK depends on this, so, for example, they may have spent 10 years working their way to settlement in the UK, but if they submit their extension application *even one day late*, they will become an overstayer and all their time, money and energy spent in the last 10 years will reset them back to zero and they will have to begin anew.

These applications demand precise attention to detail, particularly fee waivers where every 't' needs to be crossed and every 'i' dotted, and all information needs to be evidenced. Yet as these clients are highly vulnerable, it is sometimes next to impossible to gather the necessary documents. A recent example was a stroke victim, with speech, memory and mobility issues, about whom the Home Office said we had not submitted all his bank statements. It took considerable time and effort for us to get him to the bank, since it had to be in person, and it was then that we discovered he had opened 15 bank accounts! The poor man had no recollection of any of them: he had been contacting the bank, opening a new account, forgetting the login information, and then repeating the process again and again.

Nevertheless, in spite of these challenges and the high level of admin work that is a feature of our department, it is rewarding to see lives improved, especially for me being involved in the journey of clients facing domestic abuse, watching them shift from victim towards greater independence and helping to guide them to a place of freedom. It is a privilege to be a part of that. From us to you: thank you for your support in transforming lives.

NN



In November, we were delighted to welcome directors, staff, volunteers and supporters to our **AGM 2025**. After informative reports from a number of staff, we were entertained by our patron, children's author and illustrator **Nick Butterworth**, who described his approach to writing, his inspirations and who also, much to our delight, read us a story!



Pictures courtesy of Alex Tyler



As all our readers will be aware, the invasion of Ukraine continues unabated. RAMA's commission by Colchester City Council to support those arriving in Colchester under the **Homes for Ukraine** scheme therefore also continues. Arrivals have slowed but we still register new Ukrainian clients approximately monthly, offering a warm welcome, interpretation, UK SIM cards, help with GP registrations, assistance opening bank accounts... our support is comprehensive and wrap-around.

We refer to Social Care where necessary; obtain immigration advice from our IAA regulated immigration team; make school applications; advise on issues at school; provide information on university education; negotiate with landlords; offer employment support; provide references and facilitate re-matches between guests and new hosts. A solid array of casework!

Our work under this scheme encompasses assistance to hosts as well as to visitors: we negotiate a wide range of issues common when strangers from diverse nations agree to live together under the same roof for months, or more frequently years, on end.

We also help our clients make multiple housing applications. We are proud our small team has ensured that every single family presenting to us as homeless, whom we have subsequently referred to the very supportive housing team at Colchester City Council, has been accommodated that same day (albeit in emergency hotel accommodation of varying quality), and that the families have then moved fairly quickly through temporary accommodation to more permanent or social housing.

We have been privy to many family reunions: elderly parents joining their adult children, for example; mothers reunited with sons, now that young adult males are permitted to leave Ukraine; and of course husbands with wives. And we have also been involved with numerous re-matches, with wonderful hosts who are hosting for a second or even third period.

Here are some examples of feedback received from guests and hosts:

"Thank you very much, and please pass on my thanks to the [Council's] Communities Team as well. I really appreciate your help and support." (Guest Nataliia)

"We are very grateful for your help with everything and always. Three years is already a new life. Thank you for your support of my life and my family." (Guest Natasha)

"My impression of RAMA is that you are all very professional, knowledgeable, compassionate and fair." (Host Amy)

"Thank you for all your kindness and support in hard times for me." (Guest Mariia)

"As always, very grateful to you, you are such a blessing to the refugee community and all those who engage with them." (Host Amanda)

That just leaves me to say... *dyakuyu and do pobachennya !*

MMC

Festive fun at the Saturday Ukraine Club Christmas Party!



Contributors: Maud-May Cuthbert, Nathan Niesley, Barry Gilheaney, Jenny Wilson, Sarah Foley, Kubra Irshad, Maria Wilby, Elizabeth Long

We hope you've found this informative. Please address any comments to the editor: el@rama.org.uk