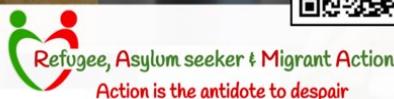


Starting on Monday 12th February at 4:30pm



Our **Slow Cooker Club for 2024** began with the first of six sessions on 12 February with good attendance and a positive, fun-filled atmosphere. Many of our clients were already eager and waiting for the classes to start.

In the class we showed them how to use a slow cooker and its advantages, the most important of which are energy efficiency and the ability to leave it cooking, knowing that with minimum effort, you will have a healthy nutritious meal at the end of the day.

Each session begins by giving participants an opportunity to taste a dish that I have

prepared beforehand and this is followed by a demonstration of the preparation and cooking process. They are then provided with the same ingredients as I have used and after this they are able to replicate the dish for themselves. Finally, everyone is encouraged to share a photo of their work on our WhatsApp group.



I recently attended a series of cooking classes organised by Jamie Oliver's 'Ministry of Food' and I have been able to apply and incorporate some of the skills that I learned on the course. For example, I was able to pass on what I had learned about knife skills and safety and also helpful nutritional information. I am hoping to apply more of what I learned in the future.

Each session also includes what we consider to be the most important ingredient of all - fun! We have music and a good dose of spontaneous dancing, as well as laughter. The dancing is an opportunity to encourage our clients to showcase their culture through dance.



## Impact

The feedback from our clients has been really encouraging and for some clients especially it has had a particularly positive impact on their mental wellbeing. All those who have participated have shared that they always look forward to the classes. We are taking a break during Ramadan.



**Joyce McIntyre, Food Education Lead**

## Complex casework

This past month we were excited to see the fruits of our efforts in helping **victims of domestic abuse**, as three such clients received their own status, removing their dependence on their perpetrators' visas, and allowing them their freedom and a pathway for them to remain in the UK. We would like to emphasise that domestic abuse is an issue affecting all genders, and we have found that to be true for our clients. For one of our clients there was an issue of child abuse as well as domestic violence, and it was a tricky bit of business to work with both of these claims and find refuge, accommodation and care for this client and her three children as she fled from her perpetrator. For these clients the support they have experienced is quite literally life changing. It is the same story for each: we see them emerging from victimhood with new confidence and hope, taking control of their lives, and moving beyond the trauma they faced. The client who shows up at our office now is not the same one we first met, standing taller, radiating a newfound sense of peace and joy.

NN

A collection made by our loyal supporters **Friends Not Foes at Colchester Sixth Form College**, with wonderful boxes of toiletries and other items prepared specifically for disabled clients in living in difficult circumstances in a Tendring hotel.



The **RAMA football programme** has steadily grown and now has up to 50 participants per week. We have added an extra day to the weekly schedule to accommodate the growing numbers and now play on a Monday evening with an additional session on Thursday evenings where we enjoy the company (and competition!) of teachers at the **Colchester Sixth Form College**. RAMA remains extremely grateful for the generosity of the college in providing its facilities for our football programme; without this we would not be able to continue. In further exciting news, with the help of our partners at **Colchester United Community Foundation**, the RAMA team have secured an away-day fixture at the end of April against a refugee/asylum-seeker team attached to Premier League club Fulham FC. All are looking forward to a fantastic day out and a gripping encounter at Fulham's training ground in London.... Come on you RAMA!!!!

CM

**Hate Crime:** Firstly, a reminder that RAMA is a HIRC [Hate Incident Reporting Centre]. From January 2023 to January 2024, according to statistics released by Essex Police, there were 102 racial incidents reported in the town centre area [Castle Ward], making it a hate crime hotspot. RAMA is located in the town centre and some of these racial incidents will have been reported by our clients. Racial incidents run at almost double the next highest category, homophobia, which saw some 52 incidents recorded in the Castle Ward area. Other incidents relating to protected characteristics, eg victims abused because of their religion or for being transgender, were also reported at lower rates. These incidents affect victims, their families and the community as a whole. RAMA continues to work closely and collaboratively with Essex Police to maintain a safe community and prevent further incidents.

**Colchester Carnival:** RAMA is delighted to be participating once again in the upcoming carnival on 13 July. We are involved in the pre-planning meetings and preparing well in advance to make it another spectacular event. It is a multinational, diverse and amazingly colourful day and a couple of our talented clients are gearing up to perform on stage. We will of course have our RAMA stall for you to visit, and many of our clients will be attending, participating or offering support, as we hope you will too!

HU



RAMA clients spent a day in Walton to sample the local fish & chips and participate in an art workshop at the Nose Bookshop & Cafe. It was everyone's first attempt at **pyrography** but the quality of the work produced was exceptional and the experience was thoroughly enjoyed by all.

## Immigration Law: Recent changes for victims of domestic abuse

There have been numerous changes to UK immigration law. These frequent revisions have adverse effects on clients, not only due to the alterations themselves, but also because of the dearth of legal aid and competent legal services. One recent change is the **destitution domestic violence concession (DDVC)** application, which previously provided access to public funds and granted victims of domestic abuse/violence three months' leave to remain. Victims could also apply for *indefinite* leave to remain (ILR), before the end of this three-month concession, under the Appendix Victim of Domestic Abuse.

To apply for permission as a victim of domestic violence (even if their visa has expired), migrants must be in the UK as the spouse or partner of a British citizen, a member of the armed forces, someone who is settled, someone with leave to remain as a refugee, or an EEA national with pre-settled status (provided that this leave was not granted as a joining family member). Recently, this concession was expanded to include victims of domestic abuse who have had, or last had, leave as a 'partner of a person with permission to enter or stay on a work and economic route or as a student or graduate'. This broadens the scope to include a wide range of dependant partners. The newly introduced acronym for this concession is the Migrant Victims of Domestic Abuse Concession (MVDAC).

However, the newly added group of dependant partners of workers/students/graduates are **not eligible** to apply for ILR as victims of domestic abuse under the new Appendix Victim of Domestic Abuse. They will have no leave at the end of the three months' concession leave; thus, we strongly oppose this change as an organisation regulated by OISC. We are also deeply concerned about the potential negative consequences of this amendment.

Many clients struggle to obtain competent immigration advice, and some have been advised by organisations or individuals who are not regulated by, or registered with, OISC or another approved professional body, even though providing immigration advice without regulation is a criminal offence. These situations can lead to severe problems in the clients' lives, with some overstaying their visas/leave as a result. In these circumstances, victims of domestic abuse may make ill-informed decisions to apply for three months' concession leave, unaware that they have **no right** to apply for ILR. Given this change, it is more crucial than ever for victims of domestic abuse to seek specialist-regulated legal advice before applying for the concession.

AUD

The National Audit Office (NAO) has revealed that the UK will pay at least £370 million to **Rwanda** to relocate asylum seekers to the country. The NAO states that the UK has already paid £220m since April 2022 and will pay an additional £50m per year for the next three years. Moreover, the UK will make a further one-off payment of £120m once 300 people have been sent to Rwanda, and £20,000 per 'relocated' person. In addition, the UK is due to pay up to £151,000 per person to cover 'asylum processing and operational costs'. If any asylum seeker sent to Rwanda then decides to leave the country, the UK will pay £10,000 to 'help facilitate their voluntary departure'. All of these costs are on top of the estimated £20m 'direct costs in setting up and operating the partnership'.

EL

*Source: National Audit Office Report: "Investigation into the costs of the UK-Rwanda Partnership"*



**Flash Academy** is an interactive English language learning app. Thanks to the generosity of Colchester City Council, we can now register (up to 300) RAMA clients to use it. For people from refugee backgrounds who have recently arrived in the UK or the local area and may have limited English, learning the

language is fundamental to integration and functioning independently in everyday situations. With ESOL classes at local FE and Adult Community Learning colleges limited, Flash Academy provides an excellent alternative to teacher-led lessons, allowing clients to work independently at their own pace and their own level. Flash Academy can be accessed on any mobile device, computer or laptop and the app includes fun activities which help learners with new vocabulary, pronunciation, reading and listening skills. Working without a teacher, learners can select their home language to make independent learning easier and more convenient and there is even an 'object translator' to translate objects in real time. Early feedback from the app is promising, and in the coming months we look forward to registering more RAMA clients with it, particularly those who cannot currently access ESOL classes.

JW



Use the object translator to translate objects wherever you go!

## Venues of Sanctuary

In the past few months RAMA had the privilege of being asked to vouch for two local venues as they were appraised by the organisation City of Sanctuary as part of their Sanctuary award scheme. Both venues have been working towards becoming welcoming spaces for ALL individuals in the community. They have now received accreditation: the Mercury Theatre is a **Theatre of Sanctuary** and Essex Libraries are **Libraries of Sanctuary**. The awards come in recognition of the extensive work each has done to cater to the needs of different visitors. RAMA clients have been generously looked after in these venues, and we are proud of our ongoing links with both.

The development of the Mercury theatre as a more inclusive space has been a collaborative process with a significant role played by RAMA community coordinator Elizabeth Curry, along with other community groups, to ensure that access and enjoyment is available for everyone. The Mercury Theatre has laid on events exclusively for different groups of sanctuary seekers, notably Afghans living in Marks Tey, in response to discussions with us as to where there is a particular need for support and what they can realistically provide. At all times it has been a co-operative venture showing the theatre personnel's willingness to work alongside us. There have been activity days for families, the creation of a new choir—Global Voices—and the theatre has also displayed the handiwork of the women's sewing group in their foyer. Each year our client families with children are welcomed to watch the pantomime dress rehearsals; tickets to other performances, about issues clients can relate to, have also been distributed. In addition, a warm space has been opened throughout the winter months for clients to sit comfortably with a hot drink. We thank the Mercury for also choosing RAMA for their Christmas Concert bucket collection which raised £520.38. We look forward to further collaborations that will benefit all in the community.



Exciting news!

Our library service is thrilled to announce that we've been awarded the prestigious Library of Sanctuary Award 

This recognition highlights the resources and support we offer to those seeking sanctuary in Britain, including sanctuary library cards providing free access to books, online services, and computers without any need for documentation 

We're also proud to offer welcome leaflets and joining forms in 21 languages, ensuring everyone feels welcome 

Join us as we join a growing network of libraries and book lovers, raising awareness of the challenges faced by individuals in the asylum system.



We have a brand new **QR code**! This will take you straight to RAMA's Local Giving page for donations — all amounts very gratefully received. (And if you pay tax please don't forget to fill in the Gift Aid section.) Such donations are an invaluable resource for us: money that comes from funding bids is usually restricted to a particular project, while any that comes from your generous donations via Local Giving can be used for clients' destitution payments, travel costs for HO appointments, accommodation if homeless, equipment for disabled clients, extras for the Foodbank—the list is endless... So thank you!

**Contributors:** Leena Alfrhat, Ayse Uzun Demir, Mehmet Demir, Olivia Lewis, Elizabeth Long, Colm McDonald,

Joyce McIntyre, Nathan Niesley, Maria Wilby, Jenny Wilson, Hasina Udin.

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