

Newsletter - Summer 2025

In the febrile atmosphere that has swirled around the issue of immigration this summer, moments of community cohesion have provided a welcome relief. At the annual Colchester Carnival (see below), the city showed itself at its most inclusive, embracing residents in all their multicultural variety. We are proud to support the efforts of the Council and statutory and non-statutory bodies alike in promoting Colchester as a place of sanctuary for ALL residents: young, old, impaired, neurodiverse, able-bodied, black or white. Long may it continue!

In this edition you'll find, as usual, articles on recent activities as well as a note on recent changes to the immigrations rules, the latest asylum statistics and how the unchecked use of inflammatory language is leading to increasing tension and division. We remain hopeful that our community's focus on equity, kindness and compassion will mean Colchester continues to be a place of calm and safety for our clients.



RAMA clients, volunteers and staff were delighted to participate in the vibrant and colourful **Colchester City Carnival** in July. Among many wonderful performances was a classical dance from our Malaysian-Indian LGBTQ artist Tulsinath (pictured right). Our RAMA football team also joined us, carrying our banner as we proudly represented our multinational clients.



Those involved in Colchester Carnival are rooted in the local community. They are proud to share their diverse backgrounds and rich culture heritage. The Carnival is a moment when all come together, breaking down barriers and fostering a community spirit. It provides local residents with an opportunity to learn about different traditions, foods, languages and cultural attires, and is a reminder that, no matter what your background may be, there is something to respect in every culture. The Carnival has a positive impact on our community and is a powerful symbol of identity and unity.

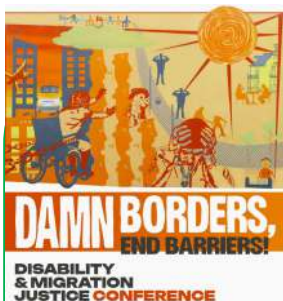
Funding is much needed for this significant event. Preparations are already underway for Colchester Carnival 2026. The success of the event depends on the consistent hard work of volunteers, in particular Major Udai Gurung from the Nepalese community (pictured right), who has the massive task of planning and organising the event for next year.



It is my second year of participating in the Carnival as a RAMA caseworker. Each year we get to know each other better and work more closely together. We also learn to profoundly value, respect and enjoy the blend of cultures in which we live. Colchester City Carnival demonstrates how we are stronger and united as one great community.

HU





Damn Borders, End Barriers: Disability & Migration Justice” conference

Members of the Pamoja Project recently attended this conference in London. In a generous gesture of support, the organisers covered transport costs for 12 of RAMA’s most vulnerable clients travelling from Clacton. For some, this was their first time visiting London; for others, it marked the first opportunity to have their stories heard by a large public audience. These individuals (some of whom are visually impaired, deaf and non-verbal or have paraplegia),

shared their experiences of living in Home Office accommodation and navigating the UK asylum process, while simultaneously facing the additional barrier of living with a disability. Taking part in workshops on ‘Institutional Violence’ and ‘Imagining Justice’, many of them spoke directly about the profound impact their experiences have had on their mental and physical health. RAMA and the Pamoja Project would like to extend heartfelt thanks to Rebecca Yeo and the organisers who, in their words, “brought together disabled people, migrants, and allies to build understanding, solidarity and resistance across our movements”.



JW & SF



Clients from Tendring enjoying African drumming (l) ...



...and participating in a Pamoja session (r).

The Haven Project – Supporting Our Community

The Haven Project in Colchester is a dedicated local charity that offers compassionate, trauma-informed support for individuals living with Personality Disorder and complex trauma (cPTSD), alongside their families and partners. Through their recovery groups, 1:1 sessions, crisis prevention calls, online support, and community outreach, they provide life-changing support and a safe space for people to heal and connect (thehavenproject.org.uk).

Over recent months, the Haven Project has been working closely with a group of **Arabic-speaking participants** from RAMA. With the help of interpreters, the group took part in regular sessions where they were able to share their experiences, build confidence, and develop new coping strategies. At the final session, participants reflected on how the programme had positively impacted them, filled in feedback forms, and celebrated their achievements with certificates — recognising their commitment and growth throughout the programme.

We are especially grateful to **Jacqui Slack** (Interim CEO) for her leadership and encouragement, to **Ashleigh**, who worked closely with the group to guide them through the programme with such care, and to **Shereen Whiten**, who provided invaluable interpreting support, ensuring every participant felt heard, included and understood. Their combined efforts created a warm, supportive environment that truly empowered the group.

Looking ahead, we are delighted that from September, the Haven Project will begin supporting a **second group of Kurdish-speaking participants**, again with full interpreting to ensure accessibility and inclusivity.

On behalf of RAMA, we sincerely thank Jacqui, Ashleigh, Shereen, and the whole Haven Project team for their dedication and compassion. Together, we are building stronger pathways of support, wellbeing, and belonging for our clients.

LA

We should perhaps not be surprised by the turn of events this summer that has seen protests outside migrant hotels. **Anti-migrant rhetoric** – formerly the preserve of far-right voices but now increasingly adopted in mainstream political discourse – has become normalised. It's not just here, either: we've seen support for the radical right increase in many rich countries, with anger about rising immigration a prime causative factor.

Politicians and others in the public eye understand perfectly well the power of words. In using hostile language – painting people seeking sanctuary as 'not like us', or worse, as criminals – they legitimize further hostility. A politician who foments hatred is effectively encouraging his supporters to act this out with aggression and violence. It is standard now for the term 'asylum seekers' to be juxtaposed with 'illegal'. (This is inaccurate: as long as arrivals apply for asylum – and 95% do – there is nothing illegal about them. Those coming by small boat have arrived in an irregular way, because there is no other viable option for them, but it is their right to claim asylum whenever they choose under the 1951 Refugee Convention). Other choice words include *invasion*, *terrorists*, and, recently, the suggestion that Muslim arrivals are automatically going to rape British women and abuse their children. Yet we know such crimes are committed in every community. In the wake of the Southport riots last year, when migrant hotels were targeted because it was believed the perpetrator was an asylum seeker, it was revealed that two out of every five people arrested – 41% of the 899 individuals arrested for taking part in violent disorder – had previously been reported to the police for domestic abuse, according to [data obtained by the Guardian](#). In some areas where violence broke out on the streets, the figure was as high as 68%. Misogyny is not limited to any one colour or creed. ¹

We know the UK is facing serious challenges at the moment. Many people are under pressure... and angry. All the more reason, then, to be extra careful with the way words are used, and not to fuel disaffection by scapegoating people who are blameless. But in time-honoured fashion, right-wing populists are targeting a marginalised group as the cause of all that is wrong. And in so doing they have moved the dial on hostile rhetoric so that others who would once have shunned such language are treading a similar path in their hostility to migrants. In the rush to win votes and distract the public, everyone has lost sight of the individuals at the centre who are increasingly vulnerable.

Let's not forget, life in an asylum hotel is no picnic. Individuals share rooms with strangers; they have no choice over their routine or their food nor access to pools or gyms; the hotels are often isolated and lacking in distraction; and people live on £9 per week. All this is a long way from the 'luxury' claimed by some of our media. Protestors deny they are racist. However they are certainly ignorant of the facts about asylum, and their confusion and fear is fanned by those spreading misinformation (asylum seekers are criminals, they are indulged at tax-payers expense, they are inherently violent owing to their religious or cultural background). Likewise, stories whirl around social media: shoplifting has increased, men are filming schoolchildren, there are caches of terrorists' weapons hidden in secret locations. And all this summer, rather than countering this narrative, formerly centrist and leftwing politicians have appeased the angry mob by talking of stronger borders, more deportations and a blitz on 'illegal working'. Asylum seekers are not allowed to work and have no recourse to public funds (NRPF): the belief is that this will deter others from following them here. However, what we see is people who, unable to survive on £1.50 per day, are pushed into informal working where they are far more vulnerable to exploitation (bonded labour or modern slavery), with employers who use the threat of detention and deportation as a means of control.

And the elephant in the room? Developed nations *need* migrants to sustain their shrinking and ageing workforces, for growth and for strong economies. All parties are guilty of talking tough on immigration while tacitly allowing (even encouraging) economic migration. It's easy for parties in opposition to demand a reduction, but in power, when the corollary is a parallel reduction in economic growth, politicians find it difficult to square the circle.

Most of us find change difficult. And communities in many places have changed significantly in recent years (see right-wing media headlines about the increasing numbers of non-white or non-native-English-speaking children in schools). However, this is far more a function of *legal* migration than of small boats arrivals. At some point politicians will have to be honest with voters. Until then, these asylum seekers will remain a convenient scapegoat. We should, however, be mindful of where this may lead.

EL

¹ Recently 100 women's rights groups signed an open letter to PM Keir Starmer and Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper saying that the idea that violence against women "*is solely an imported problem flies in the face of women's and girls' daily experiences in the UK*". They further added "*vital conversations about VAWG are being hijacked by an anti-migrant agenda that fuels division, harms survivors and ultimately impedes the real work of tackling the root causes of society-wide violence.*"

Sewing and craft sessions

Set up 4 years ago, RAMA's sewing and craft sessions have become a thriving weekly group where refugee, asylum-seeking and migrant women can meet in a safe and welcoming space. We are most grateful to The Co-Op Bank for providing a meeting room, for the fabric and sewing machines kindly donated by our supporters and for the wonderful volunteers who run the sessions.

The sewing group provides women with opportunities to learn new skills, build friendships and improve their English, while sharing their stories over a cup of a coffee as they sew. There is also a creche for children under five giving them much needed space to play.

Most women who attend have experienced traumatic events or family separation. The act of sewing or knitting, rhythmic and repetitive, is calming and therapeutic and can help provide respite from anxiety. Women like Elif*, who told us how much the group means to her, "I was depressed and isolated, I never went out, and now I look forward to the sewing group every week."

Some women have never used a sewing machine, while others are more experienced or skilled in traditional crafts such as embroidery or crochet. The women help and support each other and it's a joy to see their confidence and self esteem grow as they complete their first project. Most then move on to using commercial patterns, designing and making clothes for themselves and their families or items for the home. "I can't believe I'm doing this, cutting out a pattern," Abena* told us proudly, "I was told I was useless, but look at me now."

We welcome new women to the sewing group, and caseworkers can refer clients by contacting jma@rama.org.uk. (*names have been changed)

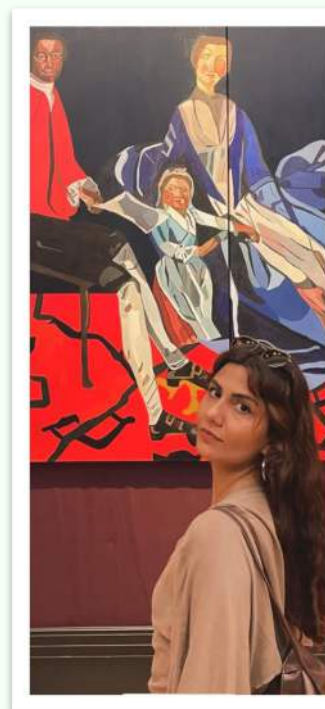
Alteration and repair workshop

Newly opened this year is another popular workshop open to both men and women, where clients can bring clothes, bedding or curtains for alteration and repair free of charge, or use the sewing machines to do their own repairs. Supported by a grant from Love Essex, the drop-in workshop is at RAMA on Thursdays (term-time) 10.30 -12.00.

JM

RAMA is delighted to introduce the newest member of the legal team, **Gülberk Gür**. In her own words:

As a migrant woman, it is an honour for me to work with refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and victims of domestic abuse from migrant communities who are not as lucky as I am. Before coming to the UK, I did my law degree and public law master's degree at Dokuz Eylul University, Turkey. I worked as a lawyer for 5 years in Izmir, handling various cases in criminal law, employment law, and constitutional court applications. I received a full scholarship to do my master's degree in International Human Rights Law at the University of Essex. During my degree, I was involved in two projects, Rights-based Economy and Combating Sexual Exploitation and Abuse within the United Nations. I completed my master's degree with First Class Honours and was awarded the Nigel Rodley Prize for Best Dissertation in LLM International Human Rights Law. I have always been interested in human rights and political economy owing to the situation in the region in which I grew up. After my graduation, I decided to focus on and specialize in refugee rights and UK immigration law, being conscious of the increase in anti-migrant sentiment all over Europe. This also reflects how the legacy of colonialism still affects people from the Global South. Sadly it is not something we have left in the past, and it is still having a damaging effect on the rights of migrants, women, children, indigenous and minority communities, and on the environment. I believe it is important to use a critical lens to evaluate our surroundings, which might not always be easy. I have also been volunteering with the Border Violence Monitoring Network as a United Nations Advocacy Officer and as an Adviser on Gender and Migration to advocate for the rights of people on the move.



I am thrilled to have joined the Immigration & Asylum Team at RAMA, where I have been developing my skills and my understanding of UK immigration law and the asylum system, thanks to the generous support of my colleagues. In working with these kind-hearted people to support migrants, I am acquiring a deeper critical perspective of the real-world problems that need to be solved, both on a personal level for individuals, and on the larger national and systemic level.

