

Foodbank report

Since the last report we have continued to run the Food Bank from Queen Street supported by a team of regular volunteers (opening hours 10.00 - 16.00 Monday - Friday). Since the new system started in May, with food parcels supplied by Colchester Food Bank, we have had to restrict clients to fortnightly visits and are averaging 40 parcels per week. However, we have many more clients passing through who can take anything from the shelves as it is our aim not to have any clients going without food in between visits. We have also had to be more rigorous with moving clients on to the main or satellite food banks if they are working, or in receipt of benefits. The new system has also meant issuing new cards to all users and increased paperwork including a pink referral form for each visit.

The initial trial period has not been without its challenges. The contents of the parcels are not what our clients are used to, as they generally prefer to cook meals from scratch rather than use processed food. This meant that we were sending back crates of surplus supplies on a regular basis. We have now had separate meetings with the Area Manager of the Trussell Trust, three of the Trustees from Colchester Food Bank and their Warehouse Manager. Initially there was some resistance to changing the contents but it has been agreed that certain unpopular items will be removed and we will receive bulk supplies of oil, sugar, flour and salt to add to the smaller parcels ourselves. This budget has now been formally approved by the trustees, CFB are receiving extra funding to cover it and we have started receiving the new supplies.

Fortunately we are still collecting bakery and fresh fruit and veg from Aldi once a week, and M&S twice weekly, through the Neighbourly.com platform which connects the main supermarkets who have surplus produce to local charities. We have also received generous donations during this time from Calais Light and Goodsforgood.UK (everything from top quality clothing, toiletries, cleaning products, reading glasses to feminine products), food boxes from St James Church (harvest festival), plus our regular community and volunteer donors.

We recently gave up one of our storage garages to cut down on outgoings and the other is completely full of furniture, appliances and household goods of which we have a comprehensive inventory and photos. Some of this came from the Prop Up Project which distributes ex-film and TV props to local charities (with whom we are now registered), and the rest from individual donors. We now also have a good working partnership with Emmaus which has helped some of our clients with solidarity packs to set them up in their new permanent homes. **SD**

Activities at the Big Garden — Together We Grow



ca^ms
Colchester Against Modern Slavery

RAMA is among 20 different organisations represented in a new partnership - **Colchester Against Modern Slavery** - that aims to tackle this devastating crime ([Link to article](#)). Slavery is far from a distant problem: it exists in our town, from youths groomed to deal drugs (county lines) to homeless people exploited for cheap labour and vulnerable people traded for sex. The partners, who include the police, the council, domestic abuse and refugee charities, social care and mental health providers, and housing and church groups, have as their goal a slavery-free community where vulnerable people are protected from exploitation. The group will run training sessions for partners and awareness-raising sessions for residents, focusing on the diverse forms of slavery and how to spot it. We hope this will give people the confidence to alert the authorities and to help ensure victims are supported.

On October 18 - World Anti-Slavery Day - we had a presence near Colchester's Mercury Theatre alongside the imposing Knife Angel. It was a great opportunity to talk to passers-by (from primary school children and tourists to lifelong residents) about being aware of the signs and reporting it if there's a suspicion that somebody may be living or working in situations against their will.

Rwanda and the Supreme Court

We were all relieved earlier this month when the Supreme Court found that Rwanda is not a safe country to which the UK can send asylum seekers. The Court made its decision on the grounds of *non-refoulement*, recognised in international treaties and domestic law. The principle of *non-refoulement* imposes limitations on the right of states to turn away from their borders a person potentially in need of international protection. This applies whether the action is direct and indirect.

Refoulement is a live issue across the European Union. Both Latvia and Lithuania have been struggling with what they consider too much 'illegal immigration' and have introduced emergency measures effectively legalizing pushbacks (*refoulement*) and have been criticized by UNHCR and Amnesty International among others. In Greece, five border police are currently on trial for pushbacks across the border to Türkiye; they claim to have acted on "standing orders from the top" because they are "paid by the Greek state to do this work". In France, Doctors Without Borders (MSF) teams have long called for an end the systematic practice of pushbacks and denial of basic necessities on the French-Italian borders. Parallel situations exist in Italian waters when rescue ships are not allowed to disembark migrants.

In the UK case, the critical question was "whether sending asylum seekers to Rwanda would expose them to a real risk of ill-treatment as a consequence of *refoulement* to another country". The Supreme Court decided that this was indeed a risk. Rwanda has a poor human rights' record and the courts do not operate freely. The Court judged that Rwanda's asylum system is not robust enough to ensure that individuals' asylum claims will be fairly judged, so they risk being deported back whence they fled, in some cases where their lives may be threatened.

For the time being therefore, the UK government is not able to remove anyone to Rwanda. This will only remain true as long as the risk of *refoulement* remains. Note there was nothing in this judgment against the policy of sending asylum seekers to Rwanda in principle.

The Rwanda plan was always more a performative statement than a realistic scheme. The numbers that could ever be sent there is tiny compared to the numbers the Home Office is currently processing, meaning it can never be the deterrent the government claims. The degree of state coercion required to force people onto flights would be unpalatable; and in any case the majority of airline carriers have refused to play a role in the plan. That's before we think about the costs involved in corralling thousands of people in detention centres and actually getting them to central Africa: the government itself has said that it would cost on average £169,000 for each person.

We are glad that we are not 'world-leading' in the morally unacceptable practice of removing those who come to us seeking refuge thousands of miles away to a place with which they have absolutely no connection. It is not right that the burden of supporting the world's refugees falls only to impoverished countries. (76% of the world's refugees are hosted in low and middle-income countries.) Yet other countries such as Denmark and Austria are already following the UK's lead, albeit in a slightly more humane way by stating they will allow those who receive a positive asylum decision while in a third country to return to Europe (while in the UK's plan, positive decisions do not endow this privilege, just a new life in Rwanda).

The government claims it has already drawn up new legislation to force the plan through. In reality it will need to prove that asylum seekers would face at least as fair an asylum system in Rwanda as they do here. There is much work to be done on that. This 'cash-for-people' deal has so far cost £140 million that could have been better spent improving our own treatment of, and provision for, asylum seekers. It is unacceptable that our government thinks it can relinquish responsibility to those seeking sanctuary in the UK by not allowing them a fair hearing here. Despite the noise in the media, we hope that most people in our country will recognize the importance of maintaining our reputation as a country of compassion and high moral values.

EL

Involuntary dislocation

Involuntary dislocation refers to the forced relocation or displacement of individuals from their homes and communities owing to factors such as conflict, persecution, or other life-threatening circumstances. Such harrowing experiences often lead people to seek asylum in safer countries like the UK. Their hope is to find a secure and stable environment where they can rebuild their lives and escape the turmoil they left behind.

For many refugees and asylum seekers, the journey to the UK is fraught with danger, uncertainty, and fear. They have high expectations of finding safety and security once they arrive in a new country. The prospect of starting a new life, free from persecution and fear, is what drives them through their arduous journey. Initial accommodation in temporary hotels provides a brief respite and a glimmer of hope.

However, this hope can be shattered when they are asked to move again. Settling in a new place is not just about having a roof over their heads; it represents the potential for a stable life. It involves forming connections with the local community, making new friends, accessing critical services like healthcare through a General Practitioner (GP), and building a future. Repeatedly being uprooted and moved from place to place disrupts this process and creates a sense of instability and disorientation.

Stability is crucial for personal growth and wellbeing. It allows individuals to focus on their physical and mental health, education, and job opportunities. For refugees and asylum seekers, stability can mean the difference between rebuilding their lives and continuing to live in a state of uncertainty and vulnerability.

The repeated displacement of individuals can have profound psychological and emotional impacts. It fosters a sense of impermanence, making it difficult for people to invest in their surroundings and relationships. This constant upheaval can lead to feelings of frustration, anxiety, and helplessness. It also makes it challenging for caseworkers to provide effective support because the circumstances are constantly changing, and they need great skill to manage this complex and sensitive issue.

LA



We are delighted to share this report from our new partner **iCARP CiC**, written by **Dr Mark Wheeler** CPsychol AFBPsS, Co-founder, Clinical Lead, and CEO www.icarp.org.uk

iCARP has created a mental health wellbeing centre in North Essex for military veterans, NHS staff, 999 personnel, vulnerable young people, and refugees and asylum seekers struggling with PTSD or other mental health challenges.

Our history: Dr Mark Wheeler comes from a background in the NHS providing mental health support for traumatised patients. A high percentage of his surgeries in Colchester were taken up by military veterans and he soon became aware just how many there were struggling with their mental health who found attending formal therapy impossible owing to the stigma attached to mental health issues. In 2012 Mark embarked on a research PhD in psychology at the University of Essex. He aimed to identify and create an alternative to formal therapy that would alleviate poor mental health and also act as a conduit into care for those who struggled to engage through normal channels. His research won the Science & Health Impact Award 2018, and went on to be published after peer review. Also, in 2018 a documentary of his work was filmed and has currently been screened at five international documentary festivals.

Dr Wheeler and Dr Cooper (University of Essex) then went on to form the not-for-profit CIC iCARP in 2018.



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What we do: Our research (published paper available on request) demonstrates that by having people share group outdoor activity (fishing), giving them a new sense of purpose and a safe space to explore their mental health, we can reduce PTSD and other symptoms and improve wellbeing. We run groups for serving military (wounded, injured and sick - WIS), military veterans, 999 personnel, NHS staff, and refugees and asylum seekers. We provide qualified angling coaches (the majority of whom are military veterans who have been through the program), trained mental health staff, psychologists, and volunteer mentors. We implement a programme tutoring participants in fishing skills and encouraging them to socialise and eat with the other members of the group in a safe environment, with mental health staff available if required. We encourage previous participants to return as volunteers and mentors to others. We also help facilitate contact between participants by hosting a closed Facebook page. We are working in collaboration with the University of Essex and the NIHR on a large four-year longitudinal study into our intervention and how it may be suitable for social prescription across the NHS. This research has just been shortlisted for the prestigious Times Higher Education Research Project of the Year 2023.

iCARP lakes: The acquisition of a lease for three irrigation lakes on a farm in Essex is key to our plans for the future. We intend to utilise this as a base for future research and to expand our patient group to other deserving recipients. We offer year-round provision of socially prescribed green exercise intervention. We have an office and therapy rooms on site. We have introduced disabled access to swims and use the three lakes to offer a variety of angling experiences. We have created an amphibian/reptile reserve at one end of the site and also have bee hives and beekeepers on site. We plan to plant trees extensively to offer habitat and protection for wildlife, and wildflowers to encourage bees and butterflies. We have over 100 rare breed chickens that visitors can use as a therapeutic aid through animal-assisted therapy.

Our work with RAMA: For several months we have been welcoming residents from the Tendring hotel. This has been rewarding and challenging in equal measure. We have had to adapt to accommodate visitors with disabilities, including those without English. In addition, we also faced the fear - expressed by some coaches who are military veterans - that their trauma memories may be triggered around the visitors. Indeed, at first, a few did struggle, but they worked through their anxieties and this has led to what can only be described as some truly beautiful relationships. The iCARP team now love working with our RAMA visitors, whom they find warm, gracious, polite, appreciative and funny. Each visit has been special; it feels like we are all one family now. We would like to share with you (permission granted) an email received by Dr Wheeler from one of our amazing team:



Morning Doc, I try not to phone you so much as I know how busy you get, BUT, I had to let you know about this.

Yesterday you sent me a video taken on the bus taking the RAMA guys back to their residence having spent the day with us. I'll be quite open with you, it reduced me to tears. I'm 64, 22 years in the military, been to war, done all the macho tough stuff, but this reduced me to tears.

When we first started and you told me we were working with RAMA I was a bit apprehensive about it. On the first trip to the lakes I felt I can't do this. I was so stressed and my anxiety hit new heights: people from different countries, speaking their own language stood behind me next to the lake. Through my head I'm thinking 'are they looking at harming me or what?' I just didn't know. Well, over the next few weeks I could see the benefits it was doing, not only to them but also to me. I have developed what I see as a cracking relationship with young Johan (the blind guy from Tunisia) and fishing with him makes my day, and seeing how he compensates having no vision to using his touch to connect with the fish. Looking at the video, I see Mustafa at the back on the right. Look how happy he looks yet 6 weeks ago he wouldn't talk to anyone or even smile. I have totally changed my mindset working with RAMA and love it, knowing what a massive difference we have made to these people's lives, and also to mine. I now know we are 'doing it right'.

At iCARP we value every minute of our work with RAMA and hope it will continue for a very long time.

Dr Mark Wheeler

These visits are hugely enjoyed by our clients. As well as the fishing, the bees and looking after the beautiful hens, there is always food to be prepared: each week somebody takes responsibility for cooking a wonderful meal. The joy that ensues from the days spent at the centre is evident in the photos with this article. The weather has been favourable too, though the signs are that there will be little that dims the enthusiasm of these visitors!



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