

Asylum Seekers in Dispersal Accommodation and Newly Granted Refugees

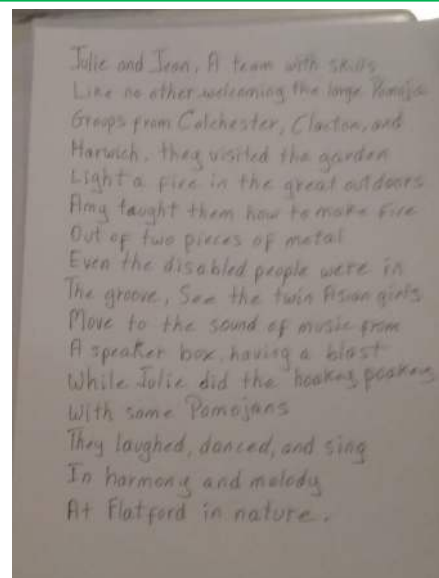
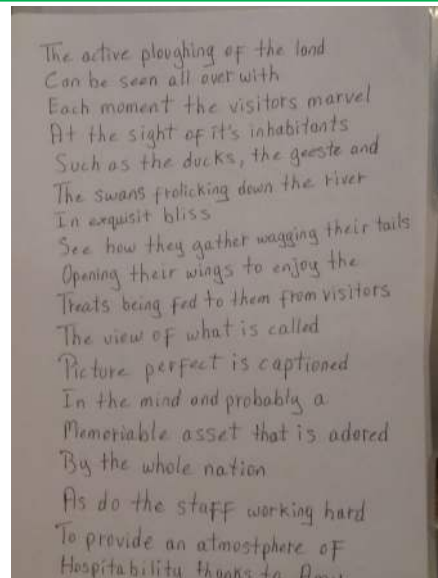
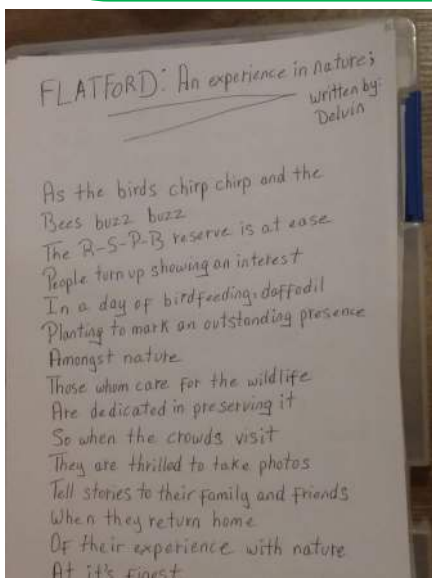
The apparent lull in Home Office activity following the July general election appears to have come to an end with a recent uptick in substantive interviews being offered to our clients and the hope that their long waits in the asylum system will soon come to an end. This is generally seen as a positive step by all concerned but a rush of decisions in a short space of time creates further problems for RAMA caseworkers with potential homelessness and capacity issues around providing the required support. We wait with tempered apprehension as life-changing news begins to emerge for many.

Meanwhile new clients have been arriving steadily in Colchester. Many of these were former 'inmates' from the Bibby Stockholm and Wethersfield 'non-detention' centres. Caseworkers have also been kept busy by the arrival of many new families to Home Office supported accommodation in Tendring. With school places in short supply and local health care services stretched, finding appropriate support is proving to be a time-consuming and, all too often, fruitless task.

RAMA Refugee/Asylum Seeker Football Team

RAMA played a two match series this summer against a Changing Lives refugee/asylum seeker side that competes in a local league in Harlow. The first match played here in Colchester ended with a high scoring 3-3 draw. The second leg followed in Harlow a few weeks later but this time the Changing Lives team proved too good and the match ended in an even higher scoring 8-4 victory to the home team. We would like to thank David and all the Changing Lives crew for helping make this happen and we look forward to a chance for revenge in the not too distant future!

CM



This happy report about a recent trip to Flatford was written by Delvin, one of the 'Pamojans' (his word!).

New directors for RAMA

We have been delighted to appoint recently two new directors to the RAMA Board. They have already demonstrated their commitment to the work we do by assisting us in several ways behind the scenes. And we know that as we evolve, their skills will bring other benefits to the organisation.

Renee Luthra is Professor of Sociology and the founding director of the Essex Centre for Migration Studies. An immigrant herself, she conducts research and teaches on the causes and consequences of international migration, as well as ethnic inequalities in school, work, health, and access to justice. Renee has been an admirer of RAMA since 2016 through her participation in the Essex Migrant Agency Forum and is very happy to contribute to our work as a director.

Bryn Griffiths is our most recent addition to the RAMA Directors' Board. He joins us with decades of experience working as a senior local government officer. He has also been on the boards of local authority companies, public-private partnership bodies and not-for-profit organisations. He will add public sector strategic management experience to the team.

We look forward to working alongside them both.



Operational Report

It has been a very challenging end to the summer for a number of reasons.

We have found out that dispersal numbers (asylum seekers living in HMOs on £45 a week) will be more than doubling in Colchester, with a similar increase across Tendring where clients are mostly in family groups.

It is presumably as a result of the closure of the hotels that was promised by our last government. However, many people arrive without even their basic payment set up and in need of urgent medical and mental health support. Our dispersal casework team are dealing with as many as 250 client interactions a week just in the office. We will shortly be employing another caseworker to help with the enormous workload.

Given a significant rise in the number of asylum decisions made, the number of clients we see is also rising. Once granted status, people are still often getting less notice to vacate their Home Office accommodation than provides them time to find a job, get universal credit or find accommodation and a sponsor. For those with a negative grant, the challenge is to find a legal aid solicitor able to take on an appeal within the 14 days given by the Home Office. At present we can find none. It seems hugely unfair that—owing to a lack of legal representation—clients who have been awarded an appeal, and who have a high probability of receiving a positive outcome on this appeal, are unable to proceed.

People who fail to appeal become unregularized and have no recourse to public funds. “Aren’t people removed or deported?” I hear you cry. NOT if you are from a country considered unsafe. Incredibly, we have seen clients from countries like Sudan, Syria and Somalia refused or unable to appeal. At this point they cannot work or claim benefits. In the longer term, it is these people who fall through the cracks and are susceptible to exploitation—from involvement with drugs to bonded labour and modern slavery.

Advocating for people with NRPf is one of our aims this year: to raise the profile of these cases and push our local authority to do something to support people in this situation. If we want to stop seeing exploitation, we must help people find access to at least basic support, food and shelter, so that organisations like ours can try to find routes for them to make a further application.

Most clients left in this situation are seen again by health or social services somewhere down the line. By this point, their physical and/or mental health have deteriorated and their needs have become more complex. It therefore makes sense in terms of cost (both personal and financial) to make access to support instant at point of need, that is, by abolishing the damaging NRPf condition.

MW

We are always grateful when local arts organisations think of our clients. **Colchester Symphony Orchestra** regularly and generously provides a number of free tickets to its performances at St Botolph’s. Most recently we had 20 tickets for clients to enjoy a recital of Russian music, including a performance by a young cellist who was previously a finalist in BBC Young Musician of the Year. **Roman River Music Festival** also kindly gave us free tickets for 2 of their performances, chosen because they were in the town centre. EC accompanied 8 clients to see *The Hermes Experiment* at Firstsite. The experimental music was interesting but enthused some more than others! They were particularly taken by some recognisably Iranian sequences on the beautiful harp. The following day some clients climbed the 157 steps up the Jumbo Water Tower for another event. At the top, a capacity audience of 20 listened to Anthony Roberts, Director of the Arts Centre, reading some of his poems while Roman River’s Orlando Joplin played pieces to reflect the mood of the poems. The views from the top of the tower were a welcome bonus.

