

The **Real Oddies Cricket Club** in Colchester have opened their doors to RAMA clients interested in cricket, and seven keen Afghan cricketers have already attended net practice with a view to playing matches with the team in the season.

Our thanks to the Real Oddies for their generous support in forgoing costs, supplying equipment and clothes, and even providing transport to and from training. We're excited to see everyone in action soon and will share pictures as soon as we have them! <https://realoddiescc.co.uk/>



## Who Deserves to be Identified as a Good Character?

There has been a recent change to the Good Character Guidance that could prevent refugees from obtaining British citizenship. First, I find the term 'naturalisation' problematic. Why use 'naturalisation' instead of 'citizenship application'? It implies that being British is what it is supposed to be, and that there's a transformative process to attain this level of humanity. However, I am not an expert on these matters, so this is a subject for another debate.

What has changed?

There have been some changes to pages 50 and 51 of the Good Character Guidance. According to this amendment, *"any person applying for citizenship from 10 February 2025, who previously entered the UK illegally will normally be refused, regardless of the time that has passed since the illegal entry took place"*. The Home Office (HO) has the discretion to determine whether an individual's illegal entry should be disregarded in the character assessment process. However, a ten-year ban on obtaining British citizenship for those who entered the UK unlawfully was already in place under the HO's authority. The government deemed this punishment not enough for refugees and individuals with humanitarian protection and sought to eliminate any potential application for them to acquire British citizenship.

This change, driven by political decisions as part of the hostile environment policy, reflects an intent to punish individuals who have entered the UK 'illegally' while also deterring others from seeking refuge. It is evident that, in the eyes of policymakers, those who arrive without prior entry clearance are deemed unworthy of British citizenship. Through this change, all these individuals are excluded from fully integrating into UK society. Yet, the fundamental question remains: is it possible to enter the UK *legally* to seek protection? We all know the answer is 'No'.

What does it mean to enter illegally?

According to Section 51, *"A person who applies for citizenship from 10 February 2025 who has previously arrived without a required valid entry clearance or electronic travel authorisation, having made a dangerous journey, will normally be refused citizenship. A dangerous journey includes, but is not limited to, travelling by small boat or concealed in a vehicle or other conveyance. It does not include, for example, arrival as a passenger with a commercial airline."* In practice, aside from applying for a visitor visa, there is no legal pathway to enter the UK for those fleeing human rights violations. We are all aware of the significant challenges in securing a visitor visa.

Recently, I represented a client in her visitor visa application. She holds a two-year residence permit from Italy and wished to visit her daughter and grandchildren, who have obtained British citizenship. The mother and daughter had not seen each other in person for 13 years, and my client had never met her grandchildren. Additionally, her daughter is a survivor of domestic violence and is currently a single mother. Despite my client meeting the requirements outlined in the Appendix Visitor Visa, the HO rejected her application, citing doubts about her intention to return. The underlying reason behind this rejection, however, was ultimately her country of origin.

It is also clear that the visitor visa route is not designed to provide a safe pathway for those fleeing human rights violations. Yet, no alternative safe and legal route exists for these individuals. Statistics further confirm that the number of people who have used the visitor visa application to seek refuge in the UK is exceptionally low. Beyond this, under international human rights responsibilities, illegal entry should not be considered unlawful for those seeking protection (see Article 31 of the Refugee Convention).

This policy change serves only to exclude individuals from fully integrating into UK society and undermines social cohesion. The HO acknowledges that these individuals fled persecution and require protection from the UK government. However, at the same time, they argue that these same people do not deserve to be naturalized as British citizens simply because they undertook a dangerous journey. Does this logic make sense to you?

*continued overleaf*

I previously worked in the resettlement unit of a UNHCR project, where we celebrated each time our clients were resettled in the UK, unaware of the hostile environment awaiting asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants. Politicians, insulated in their bubble, believe that such policy changes will deter individuals from seeking protection in the UK. However, based on my ten years of experience in the migration field, I can confidently say that this aspiration—to deter people from entering the UK 'illegally'—will never materialize through hostile policies. First and foremost, people seek protection to escape threats such as death, torture, rape, and inhumane treatment; immigration policies in so-called 'safe' countries like the UK are not their primary concern. Secondly, many individuals, both within and outside the UK, remain unaware of the country's hostile immigration policies unless their work directly involves the UK immigration system.

Legal challenges have been brought against this amendment, and we remain hopeful for a positive outcome. In the meantime, I advise our clients to await the results of these legal proceedings before submitting a naturalisation application if they entered the UK 'illegally,' as they risk losing the application fee of £1,630.

The final point to note is that refugees cannot apply for a passport from their country of origin without risking the loss of their status. If this policy change is not reversed, many individuals will be left without access to any passport, forcing them to rely on travel documents or travel certificates—both of which are complex and difficult to obtain.

AUD 



Clients on a carpentry training course organised for them through the **STEP** employment programme run by our associate Busiswa Madikazi.

**THANK YOU !**

RAMA is enormously grateful to ALL those who contribute to our funds, and in recent months we have benefitted from several notable donations. We'd like to extend sincere thanks to **Sara & Dan Heard** for their extremely generous gift to RAMA; to **patch** café for running another delightful musical evening with all proceeds coming our way; and finally to **Chris & Sarah Vermont** who have made a second generous donation. In Chris's words:

"Sarah and I first came across RAMA via an exhibition featuring work by asylum seekers at First Site. We already supported a refugee charity in London but wanted to do something locally as well. I have always worked with multicultural teams and I'm a great believer in the way society benefits from a multiplicity of skills and experience. RAMA does a great job overcoming the many obstacles that new arrivals face when they seek asylum, allowing individuals to begin contributing to the communities in which they live.

My career has taken me to many countries where refugees start their journeys. We started our married life in Calcutta and I have been a regular visitor to Asia for 40 years. More recently, my international development work has taken me increasingly to Africa, particularly Nigeria, Egypt and East Africa. There are many good things about these countries but you also see many reasons why people might wish or need to move elsewhere, whether for political, social or economic reasons.

I am fortunate to be a member of a City Livery Company called the **Mercers' Company**, which match-funds our gifts to RAMA. They have also provided separate funding for specific RAMA initiatives. The Mercers' have been providing philanthropy for over 700 years and over the centuries many people have contributed to the roughly £12m which the Mercers' give away each year. Perhaps the most famous is Dick Whittington - we have looked after his charitable estate since 1424. Sir Richard Whittington was much more than the pantomime character we know now. He was one of the first rich London merchants who recognised that charity may start at home but ultimately should benefit everyone in society, especially the poorest. If he was around today I am sure he would have been a great supporter of RAMA."

## Student voice

Some may be curious as to why a neurodivergent adoptee advocate and MA Social Work student would approach RAMA for a formal placement. The truth is, there is no simple answer. I didn't know much about RAMA. All I knew was that a force named Maria came into one of our lectures and told us about RAMA's work. As she passionately shared client stories, I was taken on a journey of emotions: shock, anger, awe, disbelief, sorrow...

... *Shock* at the amount of injustice some migrants endure just to get here, often in desperation, in the hope of a better life for themselves and their families. *Anger* at how British politics and media create collective misunderstanding through perpetuating false narratives that discriminate against an already marginalised community. *Awe* at the mountains that deep care and compassion can move in seemingly impossible situations. And *disbelief* on hearing about the 'hostile environment': the series of policies enacted since 2012 to make life in the UK as unbearable as possible for unregulated migrants by blocking access to public services and pushing them into extreme poverty. That a bill to deter vulnerable people from accessing help was ever even passed left me mouth agape like I'd done a round with the ghost of Muhammad Ali. How did I not know this already?

I was certainly in the dark, but not like my dad. He was a gentle giant who loved to help people and raised us to not judge others. However, whenever the news reported more migrants arriving he flew into a rage, banging his fist on the table, face scarlet, shouting: "They're coming to steal *our jobs!*"

What my wonderful, uninformed, working-class dad didn't know was that his beloved adopted daughter came from a line of people who travelled all the way from north India and south Asia. With limited access to my biological origins as an infant, we assumed for years I was fully British with a splash of Italian. So, when as an adult I saw the results of my Ancestry DNA, I was shocked to say the least - and that memory of my father fizzed through my mind like a firework. But I didn't feel fury toward my dad, I felt sympathy for him: he was a good man. If he'd known the truth, he would have extended to this community the compassion and empathy he showed to so many others. But my dad, like many other good people, was convinced by the simplistic, divisive and demonising narrative of 'asylum seekers coming over to steal our jobs, swallow our space and take all our public funding'.... I am yet to see that this is ever the case in reality.

The work that RAMA does is hard to summarise. It helps migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and those without recourse to public funds from over 100 countries - no person's story is the same. Cases can be highly complex, even for the most experienced caseworkers, demonstrating how crucial specialist support for this community is.

Sometimes individuals arrive by choice and sometimes they do not. According to Gov.uk, modern day slavery is: *"the recruitment, movement, harbouring or receiving of children, women or men through the use of force, coercion, abuse of vulnerability, deception or other means for the purpose of exploitation."* But what we don't talk about is a type of slavery that is less defined: it is the chains of a system that holds people hostage in their own lives, limiting their human rights, security and freedom. For asylum seekers, this dictates what they can and cannot do. Whom they can and cannot see. Where they can and cannot go. Where they can stay. What they can earn and even sometimes what they eat. If this were an intimate relationship it would be defined as coercive, but it is legally approved, and the public is spoon-fed a completely different narrative so that the negativity and blaming of vulnerable migrants continues.

As a Social Worker who worked in mental health, I understand how systemic issues contribute to poor mental wellbeing, how the cost of living is pushing hard-working people into poverty. Since supporting a migrant from Nigeria who was lured here via a dodgy 'care worker' visa through an Essex company (a company, I am appalled to see, that is not only still open but approved and used by Social Services!), I have seen first-hand that there is not adequate support for this community within the system. In this particular case, the lack of support sadly contributed to the loss of a baby.

Between 2019-2024 the Office of National Statistics (ONS) found that non-EU immigration increased by 665,000. But how many of those were asylum seekers? Attention-grabbing media headlines may convince you there are asylum seekers everywhere you turn. But UNHCR statistics from November 2022 show the total number of refugees, pending asylum cases and stateless persons in the UK (including recent Ukrainian refugees) equated to only half a percent (0.54%) of the UK's total population!

None of us have any control over where, to whom and into what circumstances we are born. As an adoptee, I understand this more than most. But the truth is that without services like RAMA, even more people in crisis – without the language or understanding to access what they need – would find it impossible to survive.

**Suzie Cain**

### Comments from other current placement students:

*“RAMA creates a very empowering and safe learning environment. We can make mistakes and learn from them while being supported.” ~ Flo*

*“When I left home, my brother said: ‘it’s never goodbye, it’s always see you later or see you again’. This is how I am made to feel at RAMA too - I know that I am always welcome back.” ~ Cynthia*

*“At RAMA everyone is supporting each other as a team.” ~ Aayishath*

*“My experience working with RAMA during my placement has been incredibly insightful. It has allowed me to develop my skills, engage with professionals, and gain a deeper understanding of the field. I have appreciated the opportunity to contribute meaningfully while learning in a supportive and dynamic environment.” ~ Alfred*

*“The supportive and inclusive working environment at RAMA has positively impacted me by boosting my confidence, resilience, and professional development. The collaborative team culture and constructive mentorship have enhanced my critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Additionally, engaging with diverse service users has strengthened my cultural competence and emotional intelligence, enriching both my personal growth and professional identity.” ~ Cassie*



### Pamoja visit to RSPB Centre, Flatford



On 25 February, members of the Colchester Pamoja group enjoyed a trip to Flatford, generously funded by the RSPB Wildlife Centre. After taking a train to Manningtree station, participants walked along the Stour River appreciating the views and spotting birds along the way. Once at the RSPB centre, and with the support of Amy and her wonderful volunteers, Pamojans enjoyed making bird boxes, whittling spoons from willow, roasting marshmallows on the campfire and tucking into a delicious lunch at the National Trust Tearooms.



Funded by Essex Country Council, The Pamoja Project is a targeted psychosocial intervention led by RAMA and AFUK (African Families in the UK). It provides culturally sensitive support to marginalised migrants, prompting better health through activities such as mental health awareness, exercise, art therapy, social outings and shared meals. While not a clinical intervention, Pamoja plays a crucial role in preventing mental health issues from escalating by offering psychosocial support in a safe and understanding space.



The benefits of walking in nature and spending time outdoors are well documented, having been shown to improve physical health, to boost mental wellbeing and to help us sleep. Feedback from our own Pamojans certainly seems to support this. On this occasion, we were also delighted to welcome a family recently arrived from Yemen. For the three young children, it was the first time they had been on a train (ever!) and they loved drawing, colouring and feeding the ducks on the river.

**JW**

Capturing the essence of the day, one of our Pamojans wrote the following poem:

### “Manning Tree”

Greater Anglia from Colchester Town  
 Pamojans hopped on with joy  
 The sound  
 To North Station the must train swap  
 On platform two  
 Manning Tree is our next stop  
 A journey worth us going there of course  
 A walk outdoor  
 Prepared we cheer  
 In hightop boots the gear we wear  
 A muddy trail awaits we steer  
 15 the group we dare no fear  
 A whistling sound means the magpies are around  
 The robins sing out loud because  
 They're not shy  
 The Canada geese honking sound release  
 A bit of exercise and fresh air with ease  
 Pass the River Stour  
 Here we go  
 Through the sluice and the ford  
 As you know down the track  
 To Flatford Mill  
 We saw the back  
 Round the tables there we sat  
 Whittling spoons and making birdboxes  
 As the Blue Tits need a home to nest  
 The RSPB Nature Reserve is a place  
 The wild life thrives  
 From the wooden handcrafted statue  
 Up front  
 With the frog on top  
 To the Snow Drop white flowers  
 Purple Crocus and yellow Daffodils

On spot  
 The bees swarm the flowers of the sweet box  
 shrub  
 Enjoying its sweet nectar  
 As well as  
 The presence of the fig and apple tree  
 In the garden creating evolution  
 The feeling the emotion  
 Like the ocean  
 So deep rooted devotion  
 Is our promotion  
 With inclusion  
 Pamojan vision in diverse repetition  
 To light the fire around camp  
 With wood that was a bit damp  
 Roasting marshmallows with a happy bunch  
 After having a wonderful lunch  
 We had a hunch  
 The children would be excited to be visiting  
 RSPB and then walking back to  
 ManningTree where history remains untainted  
 Like the Haywain's painting by John Constable  
 We were appreciated for making such a humble  
 Contribution to the reservation  
 With respect and dedication as one nation  
 No matter our differentiation  
 Together we walk  
 From Flatford to Dedham and then back  
 To Manning Tree

by *Delvin*



And finally..... <https://www.linkedin.com/company/rama-refugee-asylum-migrant-action/>

This is our new **LinkedIn** page for RAMA... please do connect with us if you're on LinkedIn. Thank you!

