Communities Team

Colchester City Council

The team uses a limited budget to have the widest impact possible in enhancing the wellbeing of asylum seekers and newly granted refugees living in Colchester. Yovone Cook is Community and Partnerships Officer, Resettlement and Diverse Ethnic Communities, Housing and Wellbeing, Colchester City Council, and she has become exceptionally well informed around all of the barriers and challenges these people face, undertaking level one of Immigration Advice Authority training, alongside a colleague to better support people. She has also accessed funding to create a bespoke mental health role to fill a gap where clients find it hard to access appropriate mental health services. The team also run a job club, working collaboratively with other organisations and for the first time many clients are accessing training and jobs at a much better level.

One of the biggest barriers to newly granted refugees is finding housing, and the Communities team now support two schemes enabling refugees to access rent and deposits and this has opened up new partnerships providing quality accommodation at the local authority housing rate. None of this would be possible without the goodwill and understanding of the Communities team and their commitment to serve all residents in Colchester as equals. That is also why they are working on becoming a City of Sanctuary. The impact is notable. Mental health incidents, crime and other statistics have not changed noticeably because of the arrival of so many new people within our community. The funding received enables provision of casework and advocacy, therapeutic and sporting activities for the 868 clients each week. This team has been instrumental in keeping people seeking sanctuary well. They are not lonely and isolated - they have community, they have advocacy, they have physical and therapeutic activities 6 days of the week.