

Our Journey from Confusion and Control to Clarity and Creativity

English arpillera, Fran Garner (pseudonym), 2020

Photo Fran Garner

Courtesy of Fran Garner

Fran Garner created this piece in response to the online exhibition [*Conflict, Famine and Displacement: Then and Now*](#), facilitated by Professor Karen Corrigan, Newcastle University, England, June 2020. Through her arpillera she portrays her own journey of displacement from her family home as a result of domestic violence.



“According to the Crime Survey for England and Wales year ending March 2019, an estimated 5.7% of adults (2.4 million) had experienced domestic abuse in the last year. Of this figure, 7,950 are estimated to have been displaced and in need of temporary accommodation. I am one of those statistics which is why I have kept my identity anonymous by using a pseudonym. Being displaced as a result of domestic abuse and now in lockdown and working from home, I rarely leave the house except to buy food. The UN has described the worldwide increase in the domestic abuse triggered by lockdown as a “shadow pandemic”. It is thought that cases have increased by 20% as many people are trapped at home with their abuser. During this period, my fourth time in family court had come to an end without any positive changes. I needed to process all that has happened to me in a positive and creative way so that I could make this important personal and global struggle more visible.

I gathered together different materials from clothes I had grown out of, face flannels and other materials and thought about how I would convey the stages of our displacement journey. It was important to the meaning of my *arpillera* that it should not end up as neat and perfectly stitched because we have yet not reached the end point of our displacement as a family unit. I am still reaching out to my eldest son who we have been estranged from for a year now...

The red flag on the left of the *arpillera* indicates the danger that me and my children were in before we fled. The jack-in-the box symbolises the feeling of entrapment that my former partner and family had forced upon us by their controlling behaviours. They kept trying to shut the lid whilst I kept wanting to jump up and see the beauty of a world beyond our confinement. The migration path from the box that I have depicted is deliberately not straight and clear. I also wanted to include the unexpected kindnesses we have had along the way which are represented by the flowers.

For many years, I could not see the wood from the trees and tried desperately to coordinate and communicate with my ex for the sake of the children. (as recommended by the family court). However, this led to even more control, stress and confusion. I continued to be undermined and my own words were used against me. This phase is depicted by the threatening forest. I eventually decided that there was nothing more I could do to make co-parenting work. It was this realisation that allowed me to find my way out of the confusing and dark forest. Now, as the *arpillera* conveys, we are in a much sunnier place though it is not all plain sailing and the clouds represent that. My youngest son is still with me for half the week and I am reaching out to my eldest son who remains perilously close to the red flag, but does not realise it. I have not sewn the last bit of our migratory journey because we do not know where it is leading us. It is secured by a safety pin because the safety and security of both my children are my priorities.

I have loved doing this project and I kept reflecting on more ideas even after the main details were complete. It was a real release for me to think in the metaphors that the *arpillera* art form permits about my displacement journey. Illustrating the stages of my own domestic abuse has been a real eye opener for me and it's so important that during the UK's Refugee Week that the world understands that refugees can be home-grown too".