



RAIS Lancaster

Refugee Advocacy, Information and Support

Annual Report 2018 - 2019

Contents

1. CONTEXT AND HISTORY	3
2. MAIN ACTIVITIES	3
2.1 The drop-in.....	3
2.2 The helpline.....	3
2.3 Long-term support	4
2.4 Lancaster University Immigration Law Clinic	4
2.5 Furniture register	5
3. USE OF SERVICES.....	5
4. STAFFING AND TRAINING	8
4.1 Volunteer recruitment and training.....	8
4.2 Interpreting services	9
5. WORKING WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS.....	9
6. FINANCIAL REPORT	11
6.1 Financial statement.....	11

1. CONTEXT AND HISTORY

The purpose of RAIS is to provide advocacy, information and support services to refugees and asylum seekers living in Lancaster and Morecambe.

Its aims are:

- To provide advocacy and information for asylum seekers as they engage with the asylum process and for refugees as they accustom themselves to living and working in the UK.
- To encourage refugees and asylum seekers to develop strong links with the local community.
- To encourage independent living for refugees and asylum seekers where they understand our culture and can operate effectively within it with confidence.

RAIS Lancaster has now been up and running for two years. In that time our processes and activities have changed in response to increasing demand and changing circumstances.

There are now the full complement of 35 houses and flats managed by Serco on behalf of the Home Office for asylum seekers in Lancaster and Morecambe area. The flow of asylum seekers has speeded up, while the number at any one time remains constant at 150. More and more asylum seekers are getting leave to remain and deciding to stay in Lancaster while the others who are refused need more continuing support. To meet these growing demands we have introduced a number of new initiatives in the last year.

2. MAIN ACTIVITIES

2.1 The drop-in

Between November 2018 and January 2019 we continued to run one drop-in a week as we had done from the start of our project. We decided that from the beginning of 2019 we would run two drop-ins a week. The change meets the increasing demand for our services and allows continuity as people can return within a few days to have a query answered or for further information. The two drop-ins have been busy all year. We have had an average of 6.5 enquiries a week, and at busy times as many as eight in a single two-hour session.

2.2 The helpline

In June of 2018 we agreed at a meeting to use our dedicated mobile phone as a helpline and staff it four mornings a week for two hours. Some of our regular clients now use it as a means of contacting us either by calling or texting. A number of clients have used it as a way of making first contact with our services, or to report emergency situations such as arrest and detention. On average we have received seven calls per week over the year.

We have introduced a different phone number and email address specifically to serve the needs of the Lancaster University Immigration Law Clinic (see Section 2.4).

2.3 Long-term support

Long-term support for clients has continued to take up much of the volunteers' time during the last year and has mostly consisted of accompanying clients to various appointments and helping them to find and move into new accommodation when they have leave to remain. One development in our support work is that we have supported a number of women, both asylum seekers and refugees, who have become pregnant, most of them referred to us by midwives. We have referred them to appropriate perinatal services, liaised with midwives, health visitors and social workers and helped them to understand how those services work. We have also helped them to secure their entitlement to support during pregnancy and after they have given birth. In addition we have collected baby clothes toys and equipment generously donated by the local community and ensured they have everything they needed for themselves and their babies.

Our support work has also developed significantly in providing welfare in terms of money as well as support. The asylum seekers and refugees often have needs that cannot be met by the minimal financial support they receive. Our Welfare Fund has been used to pay fares for a range of essential journeys and provide medicines and health products they need that are not available on the NHS.

Figures show 19 individuals and families approaching the drop-in more than five times and therefore being offered long-term support (by our definition). Some are much more in need than others and support can last over several months. Support included: help with the asylum process including new claims, the process of leave to remain including housing, appeals against asylum refusal, and support during pregnancy.

2.4 Lancaster University Immigration Law Clinic

In March and April the Law Clinic ran 4 sessions attended by 13 clients. Since then the Clinic has become part of an accredited course for year 2 students and the University is contributing to the costs of providing interpretation. RAIS continues to provide a rented room in a central location and volunteers to support the sessions, as well as arranging interpreters as needed. Currently the clinic is running four sessions in the autumn of 2019 with a further five planned for early 2020.

The rationale behind this project is that despite the continually growing number of asylum seekers and refugees now living in Lancaster there are no immigration lawyers in this city, and people have to travel to Manchester, Liverpool or even further afield to find legal representation and advice. The Immigration Law Clinic provides a source of free legal advice locally.

In evaluations of the Lancaster University Immigration Law clinic held in Spring 2019, the supervising barrister said that it was a useful learning experience for the students. They were given an insight into immigration law in practice, had chance to interact with 'real' clients and practice professional skills such as letter writing and interviewing.

Participating law students indicate that they found it a very useful experience with regard to their chosen profession, and a welcome opportunity meet and talk to asylum seekers and refugees for the first time.

For a number of asylum seekers with complex cases, or whose claims had been refused, the advice received at the Clinic usefully indicated potential ways forward.

2.5 Furniture register

in the last year the furniture register has been well used to identify donations and to pass them on when there are clients who have leave to remain new accommodation. We have helped eight families and individuals to move into accommodation by appealing for furniture and organising van hire. The biggest problem remains lack of storage space, as we can only keep on the register furniture that the owners are willing to store themselves.

3. USE OF SERVICES

In the year to 15th October 2019 the RAIS drop-in dealt with 275 enquiries from 49 separate individuals: 23 women and 26 men. (These figures do not include partners and family members.) This represents a 13% increase over last year, reflecting the small increase in the overall number of asylum seekers and refugees in Lancaster area.

Of the 49 enquirers at the drop in, 29 were asylum seekers, 9 were refugees and 3 were resettled refugees. In addition 8 individuals and families whose initial contact with RAIS was as asylum seekers have been given leave to remain in the UK during the year.

Some people come to the drop in with one-off enquiries, some return several times, and many require on-going support over a period of weeks. Table 1 and Figure 1 below show the breakdown of service users by the type of support given.

Type of support	Number
Single enquiry	10
2 - 5 visits	20
Long term support	19
Total	49

Table 1: Service users by type of support

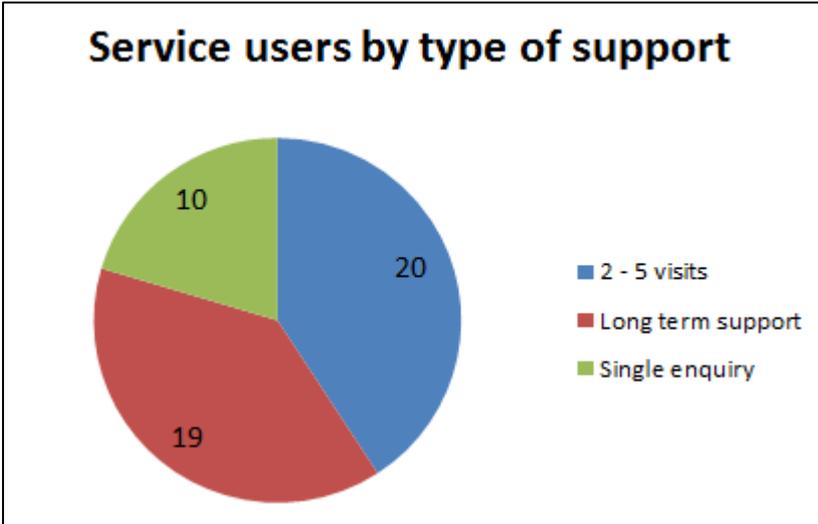


Figure 1

We have had enquiries from people from an astonishing 18 different countries. These are shown in Table 2 below. The largest group are from Iraq (mainly Iraqi Kurdistan), followed by Sudan, Albania and Eritrea.

Country of origin	Number
Iraq	10
Sudan	8
Albania	6
Eritrea	6
Nigeria	3
Afghanistan	2
DRC	2
Pakistan	2
Cameroon	1
China	1
Gambia	1
Georgia	1
Namibia	1
Palestine	1
Somalia	1
Syria	1
Ukraine	1
Zimbabwe	1
Total	49

Table 2: Service users by country of origin

The distribution of countries of origin of our enquirers does not correspond with the overall figures for Lancaster. Some countries, e.g. Syria and Iran, are hardly represented. This may be because our support services tend to attract those people who have had less education in their countries of origin, and perhaps speak little English.

Although there has been only a 13% increase in the number of service users, the number of enquiries we have dealt with has more than doubled, from 114 to 275, an increase of 141%. This is partly due to the fact that since January 2019 we have been running two drop-in sessions per week instead of one. However it also reflects the complex problems encountered by those who by now have come to the end of the asylum process, with a positive or negative decision.

Enquiries cover a wide range of issues: Table 3 and Figure 2 show initial enquiries broken down by type. It can be seen that the largest category is requests for help with the asylum process. These include everything from helping to understand correspondence from the Home Office and lawyers to volunteers accompanying people to Home Office interviews or appeal tribunals. Other large categories are help with becoming settled after being given leave to remain (claiming benefits, finding accommodation, etc.), and health issues, including pregnancy.

Our figures also reflect the fact that access to housing is a major problem. There is a shortage of social housing, and most private landlords are unwilling to rent to benefit claimants, which includes almost all new refugees. The problem is exacerbated by the short time (in theory 28 days, in practice often less) given to new refugees before their Asylum Support is stopped and they are forced to leave their Home Office accommodation. Much of our work is trying to prevent homelessness and destitution.

Type of enquiry	Number
Help with the asylum process	52
HO reporting (fares)	17
Leave to remain initial support	38
Referral to local services	12
Housing	57
Employment	5
Health issues (including pregnancy)	40
Referral to lawyers	20
Benefits	10
Family reunion	11
Other	13
Total	275

Table 3: Initial enquiries by type

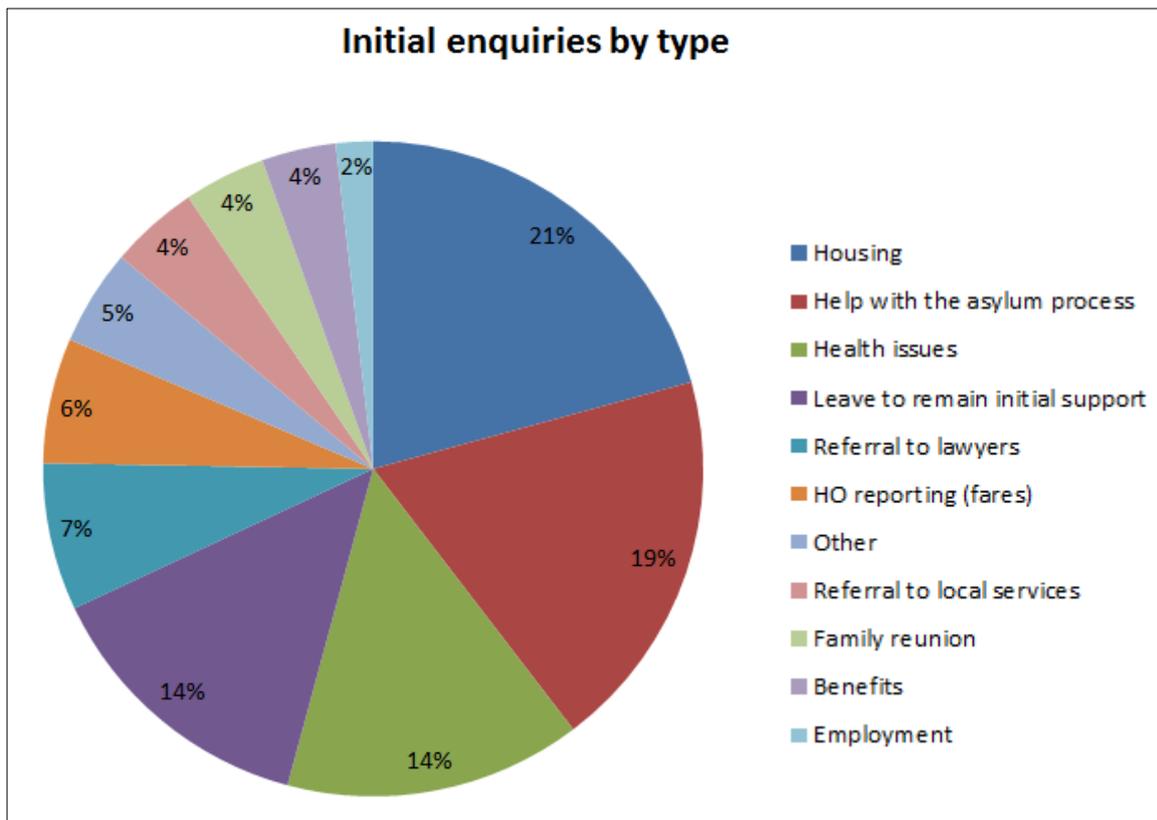


Figure 2

4. STAFFING AND TRAINING

4.1 Volunteer recruitment and training

At the time of writing we have 17 volunteers listed as members of RAIS Lancaster.

Starting from a base of 8 volunteers at the time of the last Annual Report, in February 2019 we recruited another 10. During term time we also have help from several Lancaster University students who come to the drop-in and help out at fund raisers. All volunteers who have face to face contact with clients are DBS checked or supervised in line with our volunteer policy.

Our volunteers reflect the diversity of our community in Lancaster, and include retired people, workers and students, coming from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

All volunteers complete an application form and interview before being DBS checked. Volunteer training consists of an initial briefing, followed by on the job training: attending drop in sessions and shadowing experienced volunteers carrying out support activities. A review meeting with each new volunteer is held after six months.

The staffing and activities are administered and organised by two coordinators, who also provide support to the volunteers as needed.

4.2 Interpreting services

At present we have several volunteer and paid interpreters from the local community for Arabic, French, Albanian, Chinese and Russian, and a professional interpreter in Manchester for Arabic and Sorani. We always need more interpreters as those we have only have limited availability. The bulk of interpreting is done over the phone. We also use a professional telephone interpreting service when our regular interpreters are not available.

5. WORKING WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Over the year from October 2018 to October 2019, RAIS has worked with many organisations. We have made and received referrals, and obtained advice and funding. Organisations with whom we have been in contact include:

Cheetham Hill Advice Centre, Manchester
Citizens Advice Bureau
Council for Voluntary Services, Lancaster
Cumberland Building Society
East Meets West
Global Link Lancaster
King Street Studio
Lancaster and Morecambe City of Sanctuary
Lancaster City Council Housing Department
Lancaster City Council Multi Agency Forum
Lancaster Friends Meeting House
Lancaster University Law School
Refugees at Home
Serco
The British Red Cross, Preston
The Cornerstone Centre
The Galbraith Trust
The Gregson Arts and Community Centre
The Olive Branch

We have also had contact with many immigration lawyers, and with local faith groups.

A representative of RAIS Lancaster is a Trustee of Lancaster and Morecambe City of Sanctuary.

RAIS is affiliated to Lancaster District CVS.

We are particularly grateful to the Walney Extension Community Fund for core funding for our running costs, Galbraith Trust for a generous contribution to our Welfare fund in July 2019, and Lancaster and Morecambe City of Sanctuary for financial support (see Section 6).

We are also grateful to Lancaster District CVS for much helpful advice, to the North Lancashire CAB, and to the Cornerstone, the Lancaster Baptist Church, St Thomas' Church Lancaster, Christ Church Lancaster, The Olive Branch, The Gregson Centre, Lancaster City Council, especially the Housing Department, the local health and midwifery services, and to the many members of the local community who have donated, supported our fundraising events, welcomed refugees into their homes, and helped us in so many different ways with their continued cooperation, generosity and support. We would also like to thank James Allen from Cheetham Hill Advice Centre, Manchester, for expert advice and training, and our local MP, Cat Smith, who has been unfailingly supportive.

6. FINANCIAL REPORT

6.1 Financial statement

RAIS ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 16th October 2018 - 15th October 2019 (£)

<u>INCOME</u>		<u>EXPENDITURE</u>	
Grants	7033.00	Budgeted Running costs	4983.00
of which:		of which:	
Grantscape (1)	4000.00	Room hire	1729.25
Galbraith Trust (2)	2865.00	Interpreters	750.06
City of Sanctuary (3)	168.00	Phone contract	234.24
		Bank charges	71.09
Hypothecated Donations	945.00	DBS checks	20.00
Personal Donations	1877.34	Insurance	99.31
		A/S & Volunteer travel	1467.60
Fund Raisers	2147.78	Printing/Publicity	431.45
		Legal Fund	180.00
of which:		Welfare Fund	3470.50
Ceilidh	743.71	of which:	
Fiesta	393.29	Rent deposit	650.00
Poetry Reading	362.00	House moves	605.44
Camila de Jesu	133.78	Fares	1226.10
Boom Bike Bourree	515.00	Family support	816.96
		Dental charges	172.00
Misc. sales	166.00		
TOTAL	12169.12	TOTAL	8453.50
NET RECEIPTS	3715.62		
Assets at 15/10/19	6800.80		
of which:			
Bank accounts	6746.18		
Petty cash	54.62		
Liabilities at 15/10/19	00.00		
Net Assets	6800.80		

Notes:

1. Walney Extension Community Fund, to finance running costs May 2019-April 2020.
2. Galbraith Trust grant for Welfare Fund.
3. CoS reimbursement of A/S reporting fares

RAIS TREASURER'S REPORT 16th OCTOBER 2018 – 15th OCTOBER 2019

Overview

The 2018-19 accounts reflect the substantial expansion of RAIS activities. Both income and expenditure on running costs more than doubled compared with the previous year, while the Welfare Fund, which began to disburse at the start of the financial year, provided almost £3500 in support of urgent needs of asylum seekers and refugees. The surplus of income over expenditure for the year was £3715, compared with £2775 in 2017-18. Net assets at 15th October were £6800.

Income

Income rose to slightly over £12000. The main source was again grant funding. A grant of £8200 was secured from the **Walney Community Extension Fund (Grantscape)** to cover budgeted running costs in over the year to end-April 2020. The first two quarterly tranches have been disbursed. The **Galbraith Trust**, which had financed much of our running costs in the year to mid-2019, provided a final grant of £2865 in August for the Welfare Fund. We are deeply grateful to both organisations for their support. **City of Sanctuary** has also agreed to reimburse RAIS for spending on asylum seekers' fares when travelling to report. These should be paid by the Home Office but in some cases are not. So far £168 has been received.

Individual donations of over £2800 were received during the year, some of which were hypothecated for specific purposes e.g. rent deposits. Once again we are grateful for this generous support.

The year featured five successful fund-raising events, with receipts totalling almost £2150, while providing volunteers, supporters and friends with a wide variety of entertainment and an opportunity to showcase the work of RAIS.

Budgeted Running Costs Expenditure

When bidding for the Walney grant, budgeted running costs were broken down into categories broadly as detailed in the accounts and then forecast for the year ahead. So far, after allowing for the seasonality of expenditure, spending is within the forecast amounts except for volunteer travel expenses, which have been inflated by the need to accompany asylum seekers to lawyers' consultations and tribunal hearings some distance away. Any excess over the forecast will need to be met from our own resources, which are adequate.

Under the terms of the grant, the provider is entitled to be reimbursed for underspends and we may not cross-subsidise from one category to another.

Welfare Fund

The Welfare Fund began operating at the beginning of the financial year, with an initial notional sum of £300, to be topped up periodically from the proceeds of fund-raising events and donations. Since then it has achieved a vibrant life of its own and has at times grown in a potentially unsustainable way. The Galbraith Trust grant was therefore timely and much needed. Steps have however now been taken to signpost some regular recipients to alternative sources of funding and also to identify and access sources of co-financing for the more expensive requests for support. Both will remain necessary. As in the case of volunteers' travel, the fund has paid out substantial funds to assist asylum seekers to attend tribunals and lawyers' offices, without which their rights and justice might have been denied.

Reserves

The growth in RAIS activities has implications for reserves. First, sources of grant funding typically ask for a statement of reserves policy and evidence of compliance with it. Second, the Walney money will end in six months and it would be prudent to hold a reserve which would be adequate to finance activities in case replacement funding is proving difficult to source or if there is a delay in disbursement. RAIS therefore aims to hold a liquid reserve of three months' expenditure, or around £3200. This should be sufficient to provide a cushion during which economies can be implemented if necessary. Currently, I estimate that reserves will be £600-700 below this level at end-April and therefore I suggest that augmenting reserves to an appropriate level should have first call on the proceeds of fund-raising events over coming months.

Michael Stocks
Hon. Treasurer
6th November 2019