



RAIS Lancaster

Refugee Advocacy, Information and Support

Annual Report 2017- 2018

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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 refugees and asylum seekers 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 was constituted as charitable organisation in October 2017. Having drawn up and approved its constitution and appointed all initial members as Trustees, the work of the organisation started with the first weekly drop in at the Gregson Arts and Community Centre on October 9th 2017. After a few weeks we moved to the current venue at the Cornerstone on Sulyard Street.

In the last year we have developed the work to include a helpline operating four mornings a week, hosted a pilot of the Lancaster University Immigration Law Clinic and held fundraising events, as well as obtaining a grant for our running costs from the Galbraith Trust which is enabling us to continue our work at present.

2. MAIN ACTIVITIES

2.1 The drop in

The drop in has run for 42 weeks in the last calendar year, taking breaks for Christmas, Easter and during August. In the year the 9th October 2017 to 15th October 2018 we have had 114 enquiries at our drop in (for details see section 3). Some are one-off enquiries: requests for referrals to lawyers, or help with fares to reporting centres. However many enquiries have resulted in a series of visits by clients whom we have helped and supported over periods of several weeks, and in some cases months, through our advocacy work. The drop in is the main point of contact for our organisation.

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. We use it for making appointments and arrangements and for interpreting at the drop in, and to arrange other meetings which are part of our advocacy work. 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.

2.3 Advocacy

Our advocacy work has taken many forms over the last year. It can range from one visit to a doctor, to three months of work supporting a refugee family affected by the benefit cap. We have accompanied asylum seekers to court, brought them home from a detention centre and found support for others who have been detained. We have taken them to lawyers, to court hearings, and to report to the Home Office centres in Liverpool and Preston. We have written to their lawyers and to other support agencies on their behalf, campaigned for them to be released from detention and paid their travel expenses. We have raised money to buy carpet for a family moving into unfurnished rented house and collected and moved furniture for another family moving into an unfurnished rented house. We have helped people fill in forms. We have crowdfunded the legal fees for one client who was unable to get further Legal Aid for his case. We have regularly accompanied refugees for appointments with the Job Centre, Housing Department and the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Much of this work has been successful because volunteers have taken the initiative themselves and gone out and got the job done. They have worked tirelessly over the last year in order to make the drop in, the help line and the advocacy service work so well.

2.4 Lancaster University Immigration Law Clinic

This has been a project that we have been developing with the Lancaster University Law School over the past year. The University has funded the relicensing and insurance of an immigration barrister who leads an Immigration Law Clinic staffed by law students and supervised by her. The Immigration Law Clinic is registered with the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC). RAIS provides a rented room in a central location and volunteers to support the sessions, as well as arranging interpreters as needed.

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.

We hosted a pilot of four two-hour sessions in April 2017 and have six sessions planned for January and February 2019. During the pilot project the Law Clinic assisted 14 clients. Each received a face-to-face consultation, and a detailed advice letter.

2.5 Furniture register

The idea for this project came from an occasion when a refugee family found themselves moving into an unfurnished house. It was very easy, simply by asking round, to get enough furniture for them very quickly. We decided to set up a register which would allow members of the local community to tell us what they have to offer and we would then let them know when it was needed. At present we have furniture and other household goods waiting

to be used. When we get a request we hire a van, collect it from the donors and deliver it where it is needed.

3. USE OF SERVICES

In the year to 15th October 2018 the RAIS drop in dealt with 114 enquiries from 43 separate individuals: 24 women and 19 men. In addition 10 people who were not already RAIS clients attended the Immigration Law Clinic, meaning that in total we helped 53 different people, not counting families and dependants.

Of the 43 callers to the drop in, 31 were asylum seekers, and 12 were refugees. (Since their initial contact with RAIS, 10 of the asylum seekers have been given leave to remain in the UK, thus technically becoming refugees.)

Some people come to the drop in with one-off enquiries, some return several times, and many require ongoing support over a period of weeks or months (some examples are given in section 2.3). Table 1 and Figure 1 show the numbers in each category. The largest number (42%) needed long-term follow-up.

Type of support	Number
Single enquiry	14
2 - 5 visits	11
Long term support	18
Total	43

Table 1: Service users by type of support

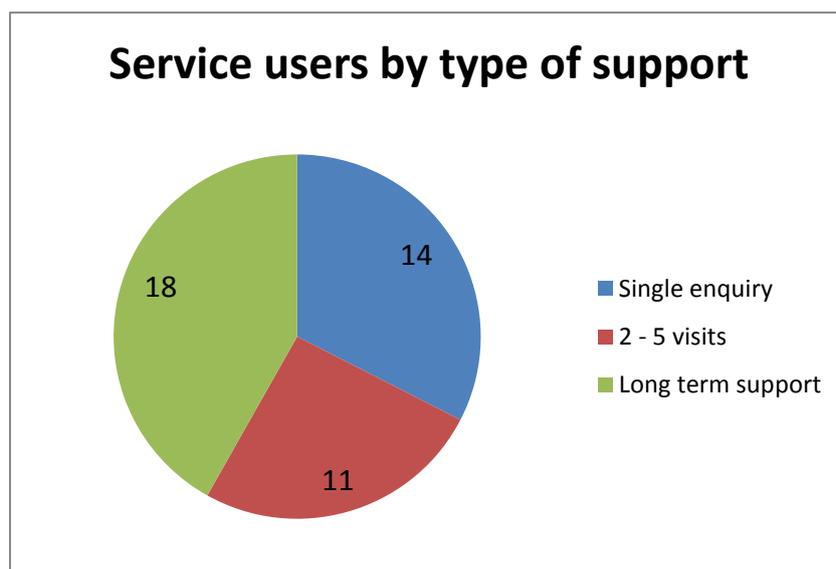


Figure 1

Enquiries cover a wide range of issues: Table 2 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 fares to report to Home Office officials in Preston or Liverpool, and help with becoming settled after being given leave to remain (claiming benefits, finding accommodation, etc.).

Type of enquiry	Number
Help with the asylum process	29
HO reporting (fares)	15
Leave to remain initial support	13
Referral to local services	12
Housing	10
Employment	8
Health issues	8
Referral to lawyers	6
Benefits	4
Family reunion	4
Other	5
Total	114

Table 2: Initial enquiries by type

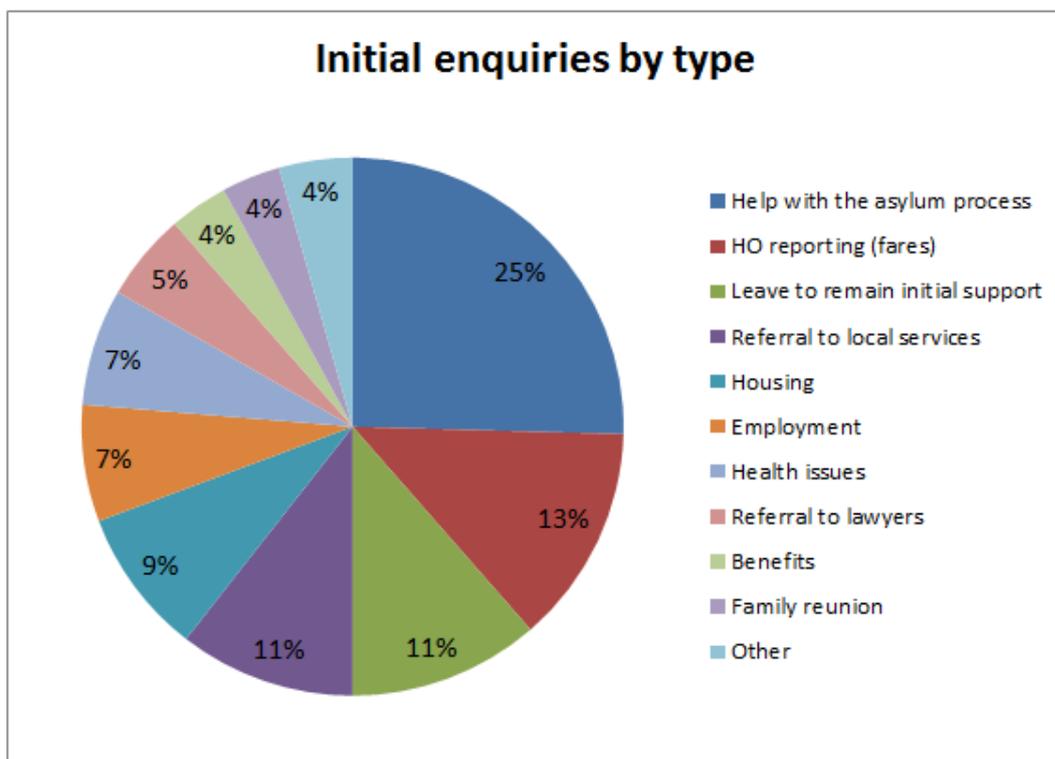


Figure 2

The helpline has been operating since July 2018. Between then and 15th October it received 52 calls and texts from asylum seekers and refugees.

4. STAFFING AND TRAINING

4.1 Volunteer recruitment and training

Initially we recruited twelve volunteers, many of whom already had experience of working with the asylum and refugee community. Of these two have left to join other organisations, and 2 are not active at present for various reasons, reducing our numbers to eight.

In October 2018 we recruited another eight volunteers and they are currently being trained. Some of this group have started working and others will take a more active role after Christmas when we are hoping to expand our services.

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 advocacy 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 interpreters from the local community for Arabic, French and Punjabi, and a professional interpreter in Manchester for Arabic and Sorani. We need more interpreters as those we have only have limited availability and we are looking to recruit over the next few weeks and months. The bulk of interpreting is done over the phone.

5. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Over the first year of its existence, RAIS has developed a set of policies and procedures that are regularly reviewed and updated as necessary. These include:

Safeguarding

The Safeguarding policy was written to comply with the guidelines identified in the Care Act. It covers areas such as DBS checking of volunteers, reporting of abuse, privacy, confidentiality, consent and data protection. One of the RAIS trustees acts as Safeguarding Officer to oversee compliance and deal with any issues notified.

Volunteering

The policy operates in conjunction with the Safeguarding Policy. Volunteers are recruited from the local community, interviewed, given training, DBS checking and supervision. Volunteers are required to sign a confidentiality agreement.

Initial and further training is offered by the organisation, and funds are allocated for training by professionals from other agencies.

Data protection

In order to comply with the new GDPR regulations, RAIS has developed new data protection procedures. All individuals about whom we record personal data must sign a consent form stating the purposes for which the data are used, and the means by which we may contact them. This includes clients and volunteers.

Electronic data are password protected, stored on encrypted media, and backed up to cloud storage, also in encrypted form.

5. WORKING WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Over the year from October 2017 to October 2018, 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
Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit
King Street Studio
Lancaster and Morecambe City of Sanctuary
Lancaster City Council Housing Department
Lancaster City Council Multi Agency Forum
Lancaster University Law School
Morton Hall Detainee Visitors' Group
Lancaster Friends Meeting House
Scottish Detainee Visitors
Serco
The Cornerstone Centre
The Galbraith Trust
The Gregson Arts and Community Centre
The Olive Branch

The British Red Cross, Preston
Yarl's Wood Befrienders

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 Galbraith Trust, the Cumberland Building Society 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, and to the Cornerstone for their cooperation and support.

6. FINANCIAL REPORT

6.1 Financial statement

Receipts

Hypothecated Grants:	
Galbraith Trust (1)	2272.00
Cumberland Building Soc. (2)	500.00
City of Sanctuary (3)	270.20
Other Grants:	
City of Sanctuary	350.00
Hypothecated Donations (3)	
Other Donations	1469.84
Ceilidh Receipts	932.30
Interest	0.07
TOTAL	5905.41

Expenditure

Equipment Purchases:	
Computer	379.99
Printer	71.97
Telephone	79.99
Filing cabinet etc.	111.98
Computer security	180.00
Domain name registration	64.74
Budgeted Running Costs:	
Room Hire	868.50
Phone contract	266.47
Photocopying/printing	130.50
Law Clinic: Room Hire	40.00
Interpreters	140.80
PAT Testing	60.00
Insurance	99.31
Volunteers' travel	240.13
Other Expenditure:	
CVS Fair	15.00
Asylum seekers' travel	380.90

TOTAL 3130.28

- (1) Budgeted running costs
 (2) Computer, printer, accessories
 (3) Asylum seekers' travel

NET RECEIPTS 2775.13

Bank Accounts 15/10/18	3016.28
Petty cash	68.90
Less: Cheques outstanding	130.05
 Invoices pending	<u>180.00</u>
Net liquid assets	2775.13

6.2 Treasurer's report

1. The first seven months of activities were funded largely by a start-up grant from City of Sanctuary, a grant from the Cumberland Building Society for the purchase of computer equipment, generous individual donations and the proceeds of a highly successful Ceilidh.

Finances were quite tight. The situation was transformed in May with the receipt of a £2272 grant from the Galbraith Trust to cover a year's budgeted running costs of approximately £200 per month. These running costs are currently on target, with a slight overspend on volunteers' travel expenses offset by a modest underspend on budgeted room rent. There has also been a generous anonymous donation of £100 per month in 2018, some 40% of which has been used to buy equipment. Our equipment purchases are now largely complete.

2. RAIS' financial situation is currently satisfactory. The net liquid assets figure overstates the underlying situation since there are items of annual expenditure due in December, another Law Clinic planned for the first quarter of 2019 and external training to be arranged. Underlying reserves are sufficient to cover running costs into the second quarter of 2019. Grants are now being sought to cover running costs over the next 1-2 years and fundraisers are planned.

3. The major caveat to the above is the unexpected heavy demand (almost £400 in recent weeks) to fund asylum seekers' bus or rail fares to their obligatory signing-in appointments at Preston or Liverpool police stations. The Home Office should cover these costs but so far have not done so. City of Sanctuary has reimbursed the first batch of fares and we have received hypothecated individual donations. However, within a few months RAIS would begin to struggle if called upon to fund these fares without reimbursement.

4. Over the summer a Welfare Fund was set up to provide emergency help for refugees, particularly for the costs of moving to their own accommodation and setting up house, money hitherto raised from individual donors independently of RAIS accounts. An opening balance of £300 was agreed, to be topped up periodically from donations and fundraisers subject to maintaining a prudent reserve of 3-4 months' basic running costs. So far there have been no new requests for this facility, but in practice the facility has been used to fund asylum seekers' travel (see 3. above) pending reimbursement.

