

RAIS Lancaster Safeguarding Policy

1. General

RAIS Lancaster will ensure that staff volunteers and clients are covered by appropriate public liability and employers' insurance when attending drop-in sessions.

Any activities where volunteers accompany vulnerable adults will always be in public spaces such as Council offices, Job Centres etc. elsewhere staff and volunteers must comply with our lone working policy

RAIS staff and volunteers will have contact with children only when at least one parent/carer is present.

2. Care principles

Our policy complies with the principles identified in the Care Act as follows:

Empowerment

- People being supported and encouraged to make their own decisions and give informed consent.

Before undertaking advocacy RAIS Lancaster will ask all clients to sign a consent form allowing RAIS volunteers to speak on their behalf when appropriate. The consent form will be fully explained to them.

No action will be taken on behalf of a client without their knowledge and informed consent.

Prevention

– It is better to take action before harm occurs.

During drop-in sessions volunteers will abide by the Health and Safety policy of the building owner.

RAIS Lancaster will report to the appropriate authorities any allegations of abuse and mistreatment that are made known to us. It is the responsibility of volunteers to report such allegations to the Safeguarding Officer.

RAIS Lancaster will store only necessary information about clients, and with their consent, in compliance with the GDPR. All information will be stored securely. Any digital information will be encrypted and protected by strong passwords.

Proportionality

– The least intrusive response appropriate to the risk presented.

RAIS volunteers will always respect the privacy of our clients and only seek information which is relevant to our work.

RAIS volunteers will refer to other agencies for advice where the client's query is beyond their knowledge or competence.

Protection

– Support and representation for those in greatest need.

Wherever appropriate and when requested we will accompany our clients to appointments at other agencies where they may seek professional advice.

Partnership

– Local solutions through services working with their communities.

We will work with local agencies, including the CAB, Lancaster City Council and the Olive Branch, which offer professional advice on benefits, housing and debt. We will seek to cooperate with other local groups and agencies including other groups and organisations currently working with refugees and asylum seekers.

Accountability

– Accountability and transparency in delivering safeguarding.

Our safeguarding policy will be available for inspection on request to clients and other interested parties.

3. Reporting abuse

What is abuse?

Abuse is any action that violates a person's human or civil rights. It can take many forms and involve a number of factors. It can occur anywhere and the abuser could be a stranger, a family member, a carer, or someone else in a position of trust.

Abuse may be:

- Physical
- Sexual
- Emotional or psychological
- Financial or material
- Discriminatory

Physical abuse

This includes: punching, hitting, slapping, pinching, pushing and inappropriate holding or restraint, FGM. Asylum seekers living with family can be victims of domestic violence, and they may not know that there is help and support available. Those living in shared houses

may be subject to bullying from other residents and this may take the form of physical abuse, although fortunately this is rare. Some asylum seekers come from countries where FGM is commonly practised, and the Social Services Child Protection team will always take action to protect girl children who might be at risk.

Possible indicators:

- Disclosure to the volunteer
- History of unexplained falls
- Unexplained bruising
- Multiple bruising in different stages of healing
- Unexplained burns, fractures, lacerations or abrasions

Sexual abuse

Examples: rape, indecent exposure, sexual harassment, inappropriate looking or touching, sexual teasing or innuendo, sexual photography, subjection to pornography or witnessing sexual acts, sexual acts or indecent exposure to which the person has not consented or was pressured into. Women asylum seekers are living on very low incomes, and may be vulnerable to pressure from men in the local community to engage in sexual activity for which they may receive money or gifts. It is difficult to tell if coercion is involved unless this is reported by the asylum seekers themselves. Asylum seekers include victims of trafficking for prostitution, and the local police liaison officer will always take action if this is suspected.

Possible indicators:

- Disclosure to the volunteer
- Sudden change in behaviour
- Withdrawal
- Unexpected pregnancy, especially if this is causing distress

Emotional or psychological abuse

Examples: threats of harm, deprivation of contact, humiliation and ridicule, blaming, controlling, intimidation, coercion, harassment, isolation, cyber bullying, shouting and swearing, denial of cultural or religious needs. This may take place within the family, or in multiple occupancy houses, especially where asylum seekers are expected to live in shared accommodation with strangers from very different cultural backgrounds who often do not share a common language.

Possible indicators:

- Disclosure to the volunteer
- Upset and tearfulness
- Withdrawal
- Distress

Discriminatory abuse

Examples: discriminatory abuse is often on the grounds of age, race, gender or gender identity, culture, religion, sexual orientation or disability. Asylum seekers can be subject to racist attacks or harassment in the areas where they live. It is essential that such incidents are reported to the police. LGBT asylum seekers are often extremely frightened of being 'outed' within the asylum seeker/refugee community, and need reassurance that any information given to volunteers will be kept in the strictest confidence.

Examples include:

- Hate crime (acts of violence or hostility directed at people because of who they are or who someone thinks they are)
- Derogatory comments
- Harassment

Domestic abuse

The Home Office definition of domestic abuse (2013):

- Incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence, or abuse by someone who is or has been an intimate partner or family member regardless of gender or sexuality
- Includes psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional abuse; so called 'honour' based violence; female genital mutilation; forced marriage
- Includes anyone aged 16 or over

Many people think that domestic abuse is about intimate partners, but it is clear that other family members are included. It can include physical, psychological and sexual abuse as described above. In many cases domestic abuse may constitute a criminal offence. Asylum seekers may have come from countries where the police are unable or reluctant to act in cases of domestic abuse, and they may be unaware that there is legal protection for victims in the UK, or that police forces have specially trained officers who can help.

What to do if abuse is suspected

Any suspected abuse should immediately be reported to the Safeguarding Officer, who will, if necessary, report the suspected abuse to the relevant authorities. In an emergency, where someone is in danger, the volunteer should call the emergency services before contacting the Safeguarding Officer.

Do not investigate or give advice.

Do not promise confidentiality. It may be necessary to inform the Safeguarding Officer or other relevant authority if someone is in danger.

Do not disclose any confidential information, except to an authorised person dealing with the suspected abuse (Safeguarding Officer, police officer, social worker etc.).

If the Safeguarding Officer cannot be contacted, and you are worried about someone's safety, then err on the side of caution and call the emergency services.

4. DBS Checks

Occasionally we are approached for support by young people whom the Home Office has designated adults, but who claim they are under 18. We refer these people to the social services and several members of staff and our volunteers team have enhanced DBS checks which mean they can work with these young people while they are being assessed for their age by the Home Office.

5. Role of the Safeguarding Officer

RAIS Lancaster will always have a designated Safeguarding Officer (currently Dr Pat Allen) who is responsible for:

- ensuring that the safeguarding policy is adhered to;
- providing training and supervision for volunteers on safeguarding issues;
- passing on to the relevant authorities any allegations of unlawful abuse reported by volunteers;
- ensuring that RAIS Lancaster complies with the requirements of the GDPR, and that clients' information is kept private;
- liaising with the local police liaison officer if criminal abuse or harassment is suspected.

History

Version 1 adopted 26/11/2017

Version 2 07/11/2018 (approved at AGM)

Role of Safeguarding Officer extended to cover GDPR and privacy

Version 3 27/06/2020

Amended definition of abuse (Chair's action)

Version 4 25/03/2024

Amended and adopted by Trustees

Andrew Nicholson

Trustee with Responsibility for Safeguarding

13/04/2024