



RAIS LANCASTER
ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31ST MARCH 2025

RAIS Lancaster
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For the Year Ended 31 March 2025

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RAIS LANCASTER

Reference and Administrative Details

For the Year Ending 31st March 2025 and beyond until AGM December 2025

Charity Name	Refugee Advocacy Information and Support, Lancaster CIO
Charity Name Used	RAIS Lancaster
Registered Charity Number in England and Wales	1193811
Charity's Principal Address	RAIS Lancaster, The Cornerstone, Sulyard St, Lancaster LA1 1PX
Website	www.rais.org.uk

List of Trustees:

Trustee Name	Office	Date Acted	Name of Entitled to Appoint
Stephen Thomas	Interim Chair	July 2023	Board of Trustees
John Chell	Vice Chair/Funding	May 2025	Board of Trustees
Andrew Nicholson	Safeguarding	August 2022	Re-elected AGM
Anas Radwan	Refugee Liaison	August 2022	Elected AGM
Jennifer Maclennan	Staff Line Manager	July 2024	Elected AGM
Georgina Firth	Legal support	July 2024	Resigned October 2025
Kirsty McEwan	Co-Chair	July 2024	Resigned June 2025
Ali Hussein	IT Coordinator	July 2024	Resigned February 2025
Duncan Moore	Premises	May 2025	Resigned August 2025
Matthew MacDonald	Funding	October 2025	Board of Trustees

Other Support:

Clive Shaw	Minutes Secretary	Resigned February 2025
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Paid Staff:

Caitlin Luna	Operations Manager	
Carmel Cheshire	Treasurer/Office Coordinator/IT Manager	
Omar Jouzdan	Support Worker	
Julie Smith	Support Worker	Resigned October 2025



Trustees' Annual Report and Financial Statements (TAR) April 2024 to end March 2025
Charitable Incorporated Organisation, Registered Charity (no. 1193811)
Date: October 2025

1. Objectives and Activities

1.1 Introduction

This report seeks to summarise the work and developments carried out by RAIS Lancaster during the year April 2024 to the end of March 2025, which marks our third year of operation as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO).

1.2 Objectives

Our objectives for the financial year were:

1. To increase the number of trustees on the board to ensure stability and the future of the charity's governance. To conduct a governance review which will include a review of our policies and a review of our employment contracts and practices to respond to the developing needs of the organisation.

Response: during the year we have recruited and co-opted two new trustees to take on the training of staff and volunteers and to develop a Business Plan

We have also received applications from one more interested party whom we wish to elect at the AGM. (These additional trustees were co-opted in July 2025 when approved by the board).

The governance review has included a review of all our policies completed November 2025, and a skills audit of the trustees with a view to covering all aspects of the charity's work. A review of the Charities strategy and SWOT resulting in a Business Plan covering 2025 to 2028.

2. To conduct staff development and volunteer training to solidify and improve our skills base.

Response: The recruitment of the above-identified trustee has made it possible to start this process, which is ongoing and requires further work. The training programme was delayed by the change of personnel in the new year but is now being resumed.

3. To continue to ensure that our services in the area are appropriate and meet the needs of our changing client base, as more people are likely to get leave to remain and therefore are focused on our core activities of advocacy, information and support.

Response: significant changes in the demographic and numbers of clients were caused by the closure in January 2024 of two hotels housing asylum seekers. This impacted on our work in that we needed to respond to rapid changes made by government agencies. However, we have sustained our services throughout the year and are now experiencing once more, a growth in numbers particularly in the refugee client group.

4. To seek to ensure sustainable and more long-term funding for the charity beyond the next financial year.

Response: we have applied for significant amounts of funding during this year to sustain our work. We were fortunate to receive a major award for the National Lottery Community Fund for a value of £225,937 from 1st October 2024 over 3 years. This has given us the opportunity to strengthen our organisation and consolidate and expand our services as part of the delivery of our 5-year plan.

1.3 RAIS's Charitable Purpose

RAIS exists for the public benefit, to provide relief and assistance to asylum seekers and refugees, and their dependants, in the Lancaster and Morecambe area, principally by providing advocacy, information and support.

The trustees have had regard to the guidance issued by the Charity Commission on public benefit. In order to demonstrate this, we outline our main activities in support of our beneficiaries below and confirm that these do not give rise to personal benefit to trustees, volunteers, donors or supporters, but are solely to provide relief to asylum seekers, refugees and their dependants.

In the 18 months covered by this report we have seen significant changes in the number of asylum seekers accommodated in the area. In December 2023, the Home Office closed both the hotels, one in Lancaster and one in Morecambe, which had housed approximately 300 to 400 asylum seekers over the previous 18 months. The closure reduced our potential client base. This was temporary, as other factors have meant that the client base has now increased again.

1.4 Beneficiaries

Asylum Seekers

At the beginning of the period of the report, Lancaster welcomed approximately 240 asylum seekers dispersed into Home Office accommodation in the city, comprising family and multioccupancy houses managed by Serco.

Refugees

There are approximately 150 refugees and their families with leave to remain who have stayed in the area since their cases were decided over the last few years.

The number of clients working with RAIS in 2024/2025 has significantly increased. Through our drop-ins in Lancaster and Morecambe we have supported 430 asylum seeker visits and 514 refugee visits. Of these, 88% were male. Nearly half of our clients have had between 2 and 5 visits to the drop-ins during a 12-month period.

1.5 Core Activities

Drop-ins

Our drop-in on Thursdays at the Cornerstone and on Wednesday at St Thomas' Church Centre continued after the closure of the hotels in December 2023. In late June 2024, we restarted our drop-in at Bare Methodist Church in Morecambe to support the asylum seekers living in Serco shared houses and refugees in the area. The Olive Branch food bank also began working collaboration with Bare Methodist Church and RAIS Lancaster for this Friday drop-in, offering food parcels for asylum seekers to collect on a Friday so that they no longer need to travel to Lancaster each week.

We also began offering support at the Tara Centre's wellbeing café from April 2024 until July 2025. These cafes took place on Friday evenings where asylum seekers and refugees could spend social time together and have dinner. RAIS Lancaster had a space for their staff and volunteers to conduct support work for clients. This was particularly useful for refugees who worked standard hours Monday to Friday who struggled to attend other drop-ins.

Our Operations Manager also attended Olive Branch food bank's weekly collection for asylum seekers collecting food in Lancaster from summer 2024 until the end of 2024. We offered welcome and signposting to our drop-ins for further support, or shared information to meet their immediate needs. However, one of our volunteers also volunteers at Olive Branch, who continues offering this signposting at the weekly food collection.

Our drop-ins have been staffed primarily by volunteers, who are essential to our operations. During this time, we averaged an attendance of 3 to 5 volunteers on a Wednesday, and 6 to 8 volunteers on a Thursday. We have been exceedingly fortunate for more volunteers joining RAIS

with lived experience of seeking asylum and have benefited from the knowledge and language skills for interpreting from our volunteers from: Kurdistan (Iraqi and Iranian regions), Syria, Tunisia, Somalia, and Iran.

Appointments

Appointments are offered to clients requiring privacy or those who have complex, time-consuming issues that are not suitable for a drop-in.

Our Operations Manager has around 10 to 12 one-to-one appointments with clients each week. Many of these appointments are with asylum seekers going through asylum appeals and preparing fresh claims. Our Senior Support Workers, who began working at RAIS in February 2024, worked one day each during this time were able to offer between two to three appointments each.

These appointments have been particularly useful for those who have complex asylum matters who require legal support. Unfortunately, due to a Legal Aid shortage, many solicitors stop representing asylum seekers once they receive a negative decision from the Home Office. They have extremely limited time to lodge an appeal, which RAIS Lancaster supports clients with doing themselves using guidance provided by solicitors to our charity. We also support clients with finding new legal representation to prepare their appeal for them and represent them in the asylum tribunal.

Likewise, one of our Senior Support Workers also speaks Arabic and has lived experience of seeking asylum and was previously a volunteer at RAIS before assuming his paid position. He is able to offer appointments to clients in both Arabic and English, which is particularly useful for clients new to the UK. Another Senior Support Worker came with a background in education and employment support for refugees, enabling her to offer appointments for work and college applications to clients.

Offering appointments has also been particularly useful for LGBTQ+ asylum seekers needing to discuss their experiences in a safe, private space so that our staff can advocate to solicitors representing them. This is the same for those who have survived torture, trafficking, and sexual violence. Our appointments are also offered for those struggling with their mental health, including PTSD, depression, and psychosis, who need to speak in a private space so that our staff can make appropriate referrals to specialists and follow, where necessary, safeguarding protocols. We are proud to be known as a safe space for these clients and have experienced a significant increase in those disclosing such sensitive matters to our staff.

Types of Support

Drop-in Enquiries

The enquiries at drop-ins during April 2024 to March 2025 were very diverse. While there were more familiar issues arising for asylum seekers, we did have more complex matters arising that required appointments, such as age dispute cases for asylum seeking children age assessed as adults by the Home Office, requiring children's social services and sometimes a specialist solicitor's involvement. These complex matters were referred onto the paid staff to resolve in appointments. However, this year there was an increase in the number of negative decisions on asylum claims post-interview, most notably for asylum seeking Iranians and Afghans. We also had a rise in asylum seekers arriving in the area who had solicitors from other parts of the UK who were unresponsive to their clients. We have assisted them with re-establishing contact and ensuring they are having regular appointments with their solicitors.

For refugees, homelessness or risk of homelessness were unfortunately very common issues that clients raised at drop-ins during this time given the short eviction notice period from asylum accommodation after being granted Leave to Remain. Likewise, the introduction of eVisas in 2024, whereby all refugees had to move from physical BRP card to a digital ID by the end of the year, was a very common issue resolved in our drop-ins.

Asylum seekers and refugees get assistance from our team with a wide variety of matters:

- Referral to solicitor before their Home Office interview
- Contacting their solicitor/arranging appointments with their solicitor
- Emailing documents/evidence to the Home Office asylum claims team
- Registering with the GP
- Booking a GP appointment
- Getting mental health support
- Accessing the food bank
- Opening a bank account
- Getting a Vodafone SIM card (for asylum seekers)
- Getting a laptop for study
- Getting a phone (if broken or lost on journey)
- Finding ESOL classes
- Correcting their name/DOB on asylum ID card
- Accessing eVisa
- Applying for Permission to Work (for asylum seekers)
- Travel tickets for reporting for immigration bail, attending court, going to hospital
- RAIS emergency welfare fund for those struggling financially
- Applying for a driver's license
- Applying to college

- Applying to university
- Enrolling children in school
- Applying for Refugee Travel Document
- Information on Refugee Family Reunion applications
- Writing/updating a CV
- Job searches and applications
- Applying for volunteering (especially with partner, Oxfam, in Lancaster)
- Finding training courses, such as for an SIA license or CSCS card
- Applying for benefits
- International family tracing for lost relatives

Long Term Support

We offer long-term support to asylum seekers and refugees who require it. Currently, we have around 35 clients in this category. This includes asylum seekers preparing for fresh claims and undergoing the appeals process after a negative decision, referring them for expert evidence, and finding legal representation. Some clients have survived torture, which requires ongoing support for medical-legal reports for their asylum claims as well as specialist medical and mental health support/referrals.

For families, this support is offered as they settle and adjust. This begins with the family reunion process, booking plane tickets, and then supporting families on arrival with opening bank accounts, updating relevant housing and benefits applications, referring for English classes, and applying for childcare and school. We also provide long term support for individuals and families with vulnerable members as well as individuals with physical or mental health problems and disabilities, engaging appropriate health and social services, and support with finding suitable housing, and applying for UC Limited Capability for Work, PIP, and Carer's Allowance, where appropriate.

Client Social Activities

RAIS had its first excursion with clients this year, in February 2025. Our Operations Manager, along with 10 asylum seeking and refugee clients, attended a two-night residential trip to Glenthorne Quaker Guest House in Grasmere in the Lake District. This was part of their Welcome Project offered to refugee support groups, for a break, recovery, and exploration in nature. The clients who joined the trip were from Sudan, Afghanistan, Kurdistan, Palestine, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Uganda. The clients explored Grasmere, took a ferry from Ambleside to Bowness-on-Windermere, walked up Brant Fell, and received a tour of Dove Cottage at the Wordsworth Museum.

Client Advocacy

Advocacy remains at the core of our work at RAIS. Given that many of the systems that our clients must navigate in the UK are complex and under-resourced, we are proud to advocate for them to have their needs met.

We have continued our advocacy that RAIS has been offering since its establishment. This includes attending the court for asylum appeals with clients for emotional support, providing letters of support for clients' asylum claims/appeals, attending appointments with the Homelessness Team at the Council with clients to request housing, attending Job Centre appointments to resolve benefits-related issues, and attending GP and hospital appointments to ask for suitable treatment.

In the last year, we have undertaken new branches of advocacy given new challenges arising. For instance, when the Rwanda Scheme was launched in late April 2024, RAIS shared information directly with asylum seeking clients should they be detained, and how to access legal advice from within detention. Our Operations Manager also established a group chat with local people to accompany asylum seekers to sign for immigration bail, which is where they were at high risk of being detained. During this time, we collected information from those reporting for bail at drop-ins to organise accompanying with one of our volunteers or staff and ensured we had the contact details of their solicitor should they be detained. Fortunately, none of our clients were detained during this time. However, we had many clients who attended drop-ins feeling depressed and/or suicidal at the thought of being deported to Rwanda. We supported these clients with accessing urgent mental health support from the GP or Mental Health Crisis Team. We also requested supporting letters from GPs to provide to clients' solicitors who were requesting that their clients be excluded from consideration for removal to Rwanda.

Unfortunately, there has been an increase in asylum seeking clients receiving notice of their asylum support (housing, financial subsistence, Legal Aid) being withdrawn. This has happened to clients who did not lodge their appeals after a negative decision within the tight deadline (often due to a lack of legal representation or not receiving their decision letter), or who are in the process of preparing a fresh asylum claim. In response, our Operations Manager trained in appealing the removal of asylum support to the Asylum Support Tribunal in London. These appeals are a non-regulated area of work. RAIS has successfully lodged and appealed the removal of Section 95 and Section 4 support for 6 clients in the last year, ensuring that each client was represented by a specialist legal advisor in the court proceedings from ASAP.

There was a noticeable issue for asylum seekers needing to report for immigration bail at very regular (weekly or fortnightly) intervals in Salford. While travel tickets are reimbursed for such journeys, there is a delay in receiving the funds, meaning clients were left with nearly no money for living essentials. We have successfully advocated for clients in this situation to have their reporting location changed to the local police station at less frequent intervals.

We have also engaged MPs Cat Smith and Lizzi Collinge to advocate for our clients directly to the Home Office and UKVI for issues such as: delays with the asylum process (interviews, appeals), risk of eviction from asylum accommodation while preparing a fresh claim, getting clarity on the refugee family reunion for family members in Gaza, and getting guidance for Syrians affected by the blanket pause on protection-related immigration applications post-Assad. We are immensely grateful for their support and advocacy.

Advocacy in the Community

This year, RAIS expanded its outreach in the community to build community cohesion and tackle misunderstandings about asylum seekers and refugees.

For Refugee Week in June 2024, RAIS offered a week of events Monday to Friday at Lancaster Girls' Grammar School. Each morning, either one or two asylum seekers and refugees gave a presentation to a different year group about their countries, reasons for needing to claim asylum, and who they are as a person. The speakers came from: Iran, Kurdistan (Iraqi part), Syria, Palestine (Gaza), Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Jordan, and Mali. They then returned for an hour at lunch to have conversation workshops with students and staff to build dialogue between all parties. A representative of Schools of Sanctuary attended the final day of events and granted LGGS 'School of Sanctuary' status the following week; they were the first secondary school in our area to have the title.

We returned to Lancaster University for our annual lecture to the Asylum and Immigration Law students. This year, the lecture was delivered by asylum seekers and refugees from Kurdistan (Iraqi and Iranian parts), Iran, and Syria, and they did a Q&A.

RAIS also provided training to 49 early career GPs from Lancaster, Morecambe, and Barrow as part of a health inequalities all-day training, in collaboration with Poverty Truth Commission. We provided information on the needs and areas for improvement in healthcare for asylum seekers and refugees. The response was overwhelmingly positive and led to direct lines of communication between GPs and RAIS for collaboratively addressing clients' needs.

RAIS also launched a monthly radio show and podcast with Beyond Radio, a radio station covering North Lancashire. This show involves our Operations Manager interviewing local asylum seekers and refugees about their lives before fleeing, reasons for coming to the UK, and their experiences in the UK. They also share three songs of their choice and share information about their cultures. The show is made into a podcast each month, available on Spotify and Apple. The podcast averages around 7000 downloads each month.

We were contacted by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and met with their representative. We were asked to assist with their dissemination of a survey for Syrians in the UK about their intentions about whether they wish to return to Syria after the fall of the Assad regime. As a regional disseminator of the survey, our Senior Support Worker from Syria, supported nearly 100 Syrians in responding to the survey, both in Lancaster and beyond. The

findings of the UNHCR report were written to advocate to the UK government for Syrians not being forced to return to Syria.

Helpline

We continued to run our helpline from Monday to Friday which the Operations Manager staffs. We receive enquiries from asylum seekers, refugees, members of the public interested in our work, and enquiries and referrals from other statutory and voluntary organisations.

Housing

This year, we tried to find new avenues for housing refugees (not eligible for emergency accommodation) given the high rate of homelessness. Once supporting someone with finding a room to privately rent, we applied for a Discretionary Housing Payment from Lancaster City Council to cover their deposit and first month's rent. We have, through the council, established a useful link with Calico to find affordable private rental accommodation in the area for individuals or families. Likewise, for new refugees made homeless, we referred some to Refugees at Home* to find them a room with a volunteer host, and once there, we support them to find longer-term housing after their hosted placement. Unfortunately, there are few hosts locally signed up to Refugees at Home. We have therefore advertised the scheme locally at fairs and via our networks to encourage people with spare rooms to sign up as hosts.

For refugee families, we have experienced a rise in homelessness upon arrival in the UK. Given that the application for family reunion takes several months to process, and then only a short window is offered for family members to arrange travel to the UK, there are instances of refugees being ruled as intentionally homeless by the local authority should they leave their current accommodation (often a shared house). Where there are children involved or a medical need, we advocate for the council to offer emergency accommodation for these families while we search for longer-term housing. For others, we have partnered with Bare Methodist Church, which has established links with a letting agency in Morecambe offering affordable private rented housing. This has proven useful for housing those not entitled to emergency accommodation and cannot afford private rental prices in Lancaster.

For individuals facing homelessness who have a priority need for housing, we have advocated to the local council to offer emergency accommodation. This has been successful for some clients with mental or physical health needs who are facing homelessness, enter supported temporary accommodation or very affordable shared housing, if suitable.

*In 2024, we established a partnership with Refugees at Home, a national charity, to help refugees with temporary accommodation once they have leave to remain and while they are waiting for benefits, longer term housing and seeking work.

1.6 Impact and Evaluation of our Services

For the last financial year, we have introduced a new system of impact and evaluation in order to represent the responses of our clients to the services we offer.

1.7 Safeguarding

The Safeguarding Policy

There has been an active Safeguarding Policy in operation at RAIS from the earliest days of the charity. In light of national guidance and experience this policy has been amended at regular intervals on three subsequent occasions, the latest being in July 2025.

These frequent and regular iterations reflect our belief that the policy is a live and active document, in need regular adaptation and revision in the light of experience. In an important sense it will always be a draft document, never a complete and final answer.

The current version (Version 5) began in February 2025 and involved a working group of trustees/volunteers in collaboration with our Operations Manager. The scope and groundwork were laid down in a series of meetings across February and March. The final document is the work of the Operations Manager, drawing upon the deliberations of the working group, latest national guidance and the practice of other agencies working within this field. It is a thoroughly comprehensive document and much more detailed than previous documents.

This policy, unlike previous versions, recognises that safeguarding risks affect both the client group (asylum seekers and refugees) and those working for the charity (paid staff and volunteers). It gives clear guidance as to how known risks can be effectively addressed. With frequent protests and demonstrations at various locations across the country (very often incited by right-wing agitators), 2024-2025 has witnessed a much more highly charged atmosphere in the field where we work. This policy has clear guidance as to how we may keep ourselves safe from those who might pose a risk, especially on site at The Cornerstone or at other drop-in locations, and most particularly for those who are lone working.

The policy recognises the importance of ensuring that there is always a designated Safeguarding Officer. Their responsibilities are clearly defined:

- Ensuring that the safeguarding policy is adhered to
- Providing training and supervision
- Passing on allegations of abuse to relevant authorities
- Ensuring that the charity complies with GDPR
- Liaising with local police

The policy offers clear guidance as to the action that should be taken if a safeguarding issue is suspected:

- Reporting it to the Safeguarding Officer
- Refraining from making an investigation or giving advice
- Making no promise of confidentiality

Incidents 2024 – 2025

There have been two recorded incidents since the last AGM. Each has been investigated and actioned according to the guidelines contained in the policy.

1.8 Volunteers

RAIS has approximately 20 to 24 volunteers at any one time, including trustees, of whom the majority are actively engaged with the front-line work of the charity. Volunteers are asked to apply in writing and complete GDPR and Confidentiality agreements and once provisionally appointed, to undertake a basic DBS check. Where a volunteer is not able to complete a DBS check without large barriers, such as migrants, we waive the requirement but ensure their work is always done in the presence of a DBS checked staff member, and that they do not accompany clients alone.

The drop-ins are supervised by paid workers who in turn are line managed by one of the trustees. All volunteers are required to abide by the agreed policies of the Charity while acting on our behalf.

We are especially glad to have had so many volunteers from asylum seeking and refugee backgrounds, including people from: Syria, Kurdistan (Iraq), Kurdistan (Iran), Tunisia, and Somalia.

In an average week volunteers undertook an average of 35 hours of work across all activities, including drop-ins, office work, accompanying, and interpreting.

1.9 Partnerships

RAIS is part of a network of support organisations across Lancaster District, working to support asylum seekers and refugees. We are committed to effective partnership working to ensure the best possible outcomes for our clients.

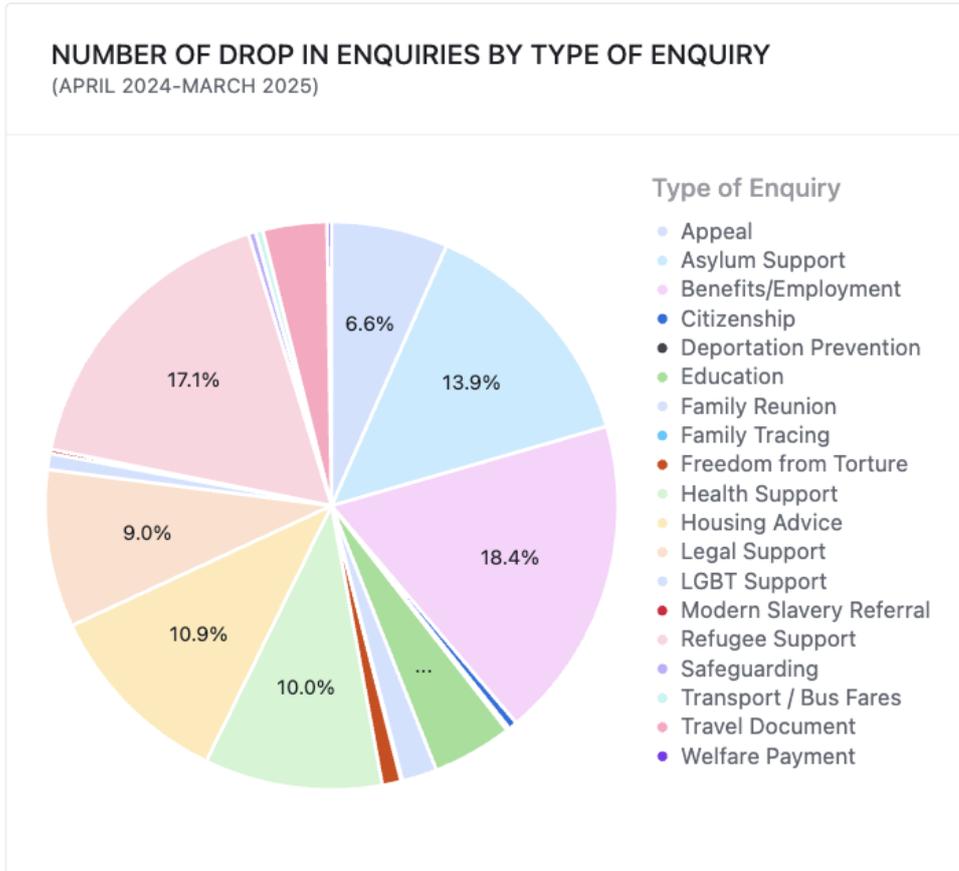
Our main partners are listed below:

- Asylum Support Appeals Project (ASAP)
- Bare Methodist Church
- Beyond Radio, Lancaster
- British Red Cross
- Christ Church, Lancaster
- Citizens' Advice Bureau, Lancaster
- Collingwood Immigration Services
- The Cornerstone
- East Meets West, Lancaster
- Eggcup, Lancaster
- Global Link, Lancaster
- Global Village Cafe, Lancaster
- Green Rose CIC
- JW Social Work Consulting
- Lancashire County Council Refugee Integration Team
- Lancashire LGBT
- Lancashire Quakers
- Lancashire Youth Challenge (LYC)
- Lancaster and Morecambe City of Sanctuary
- Lancaster and Morecambe College
- Lancaster City Council Housing Department
- Lancaster District CVS (LDCVS)
- Lancaster Men's Hub
- Lancaster Methodist Church
- Lancaster University
- North West Strategic Migration Partnership
- Oxfam Charity Shop, Lancaster
- Queer by Gum
- Refugees at Home
- Reflective Growth
- St Thomas' Church (ASR Network)
- Tara Centre, Lancaster
- TACU (Tenants' and Community Union) Lancaster and Morecambe
- The Cornerstone, Lancaster
- The Olive Branch, Lancaster

2. Achievements and Performance

2.1 Summary of Achievements

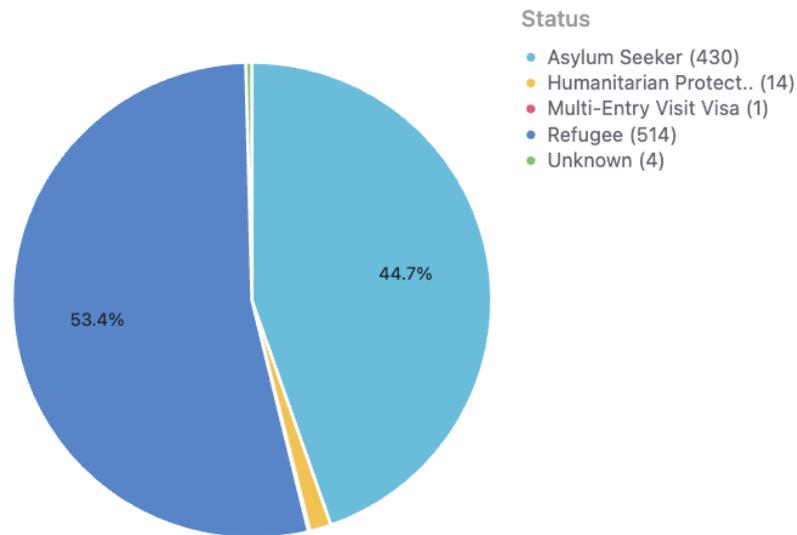
The data below indicates the demographic of our client base, the range of services we offer and how our work has adapted to the changing needs of the asylum seekers and the refugee community.



In this chart, with a more in-depth breakdown of type of enquiry categories now available, we can see which areas of support are predominant. Compared to the previous year, there has been an increase in refugee type enquiries covering benefits, employment and housing, whilst also seeing an increase in legal support and appeals for asylum seekers.

DROP IN VISITS BY STATUS

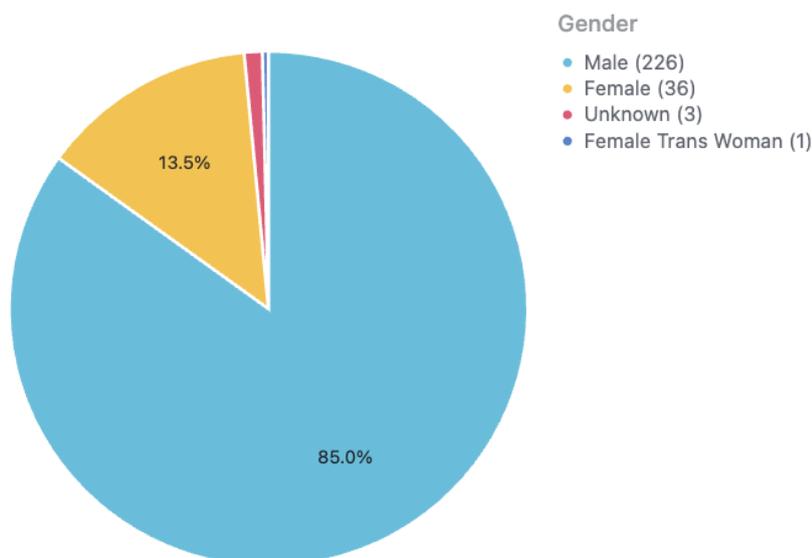
(APRIL 2024-MARCH 2025)



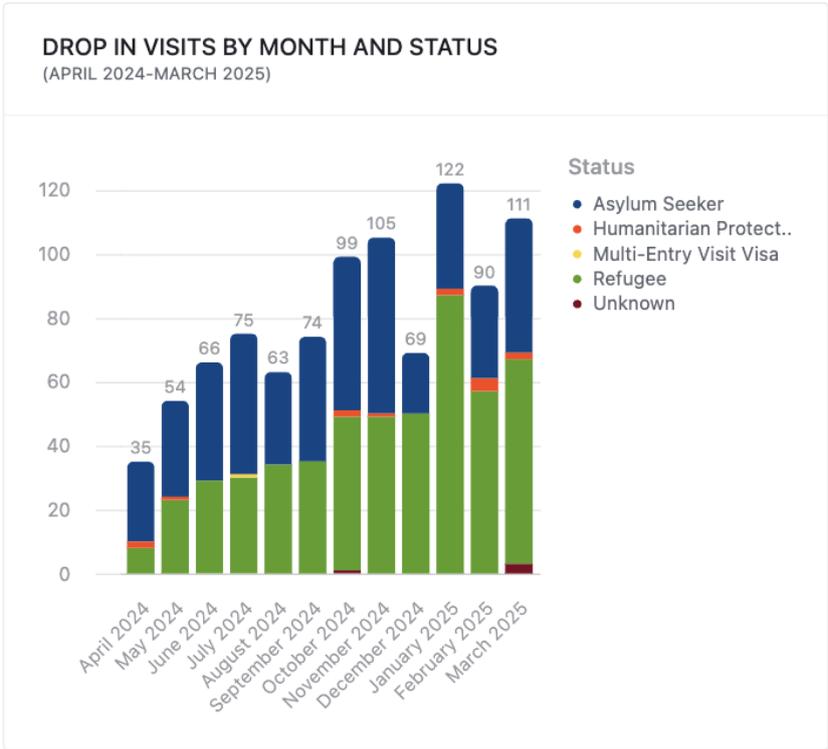
Refugees now account for around 45% of our total client base compared to 26% in the previous year. As more clients have been granted leave to remain, our priorities have broadened into helping more refugees settle into their new lives.

RAIS CLIENTS BY GENDER

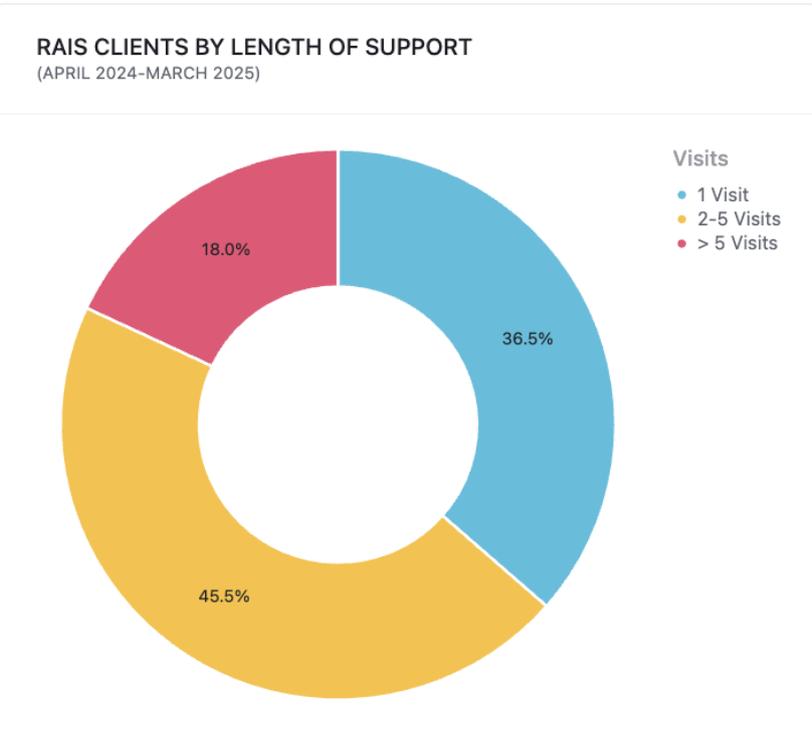
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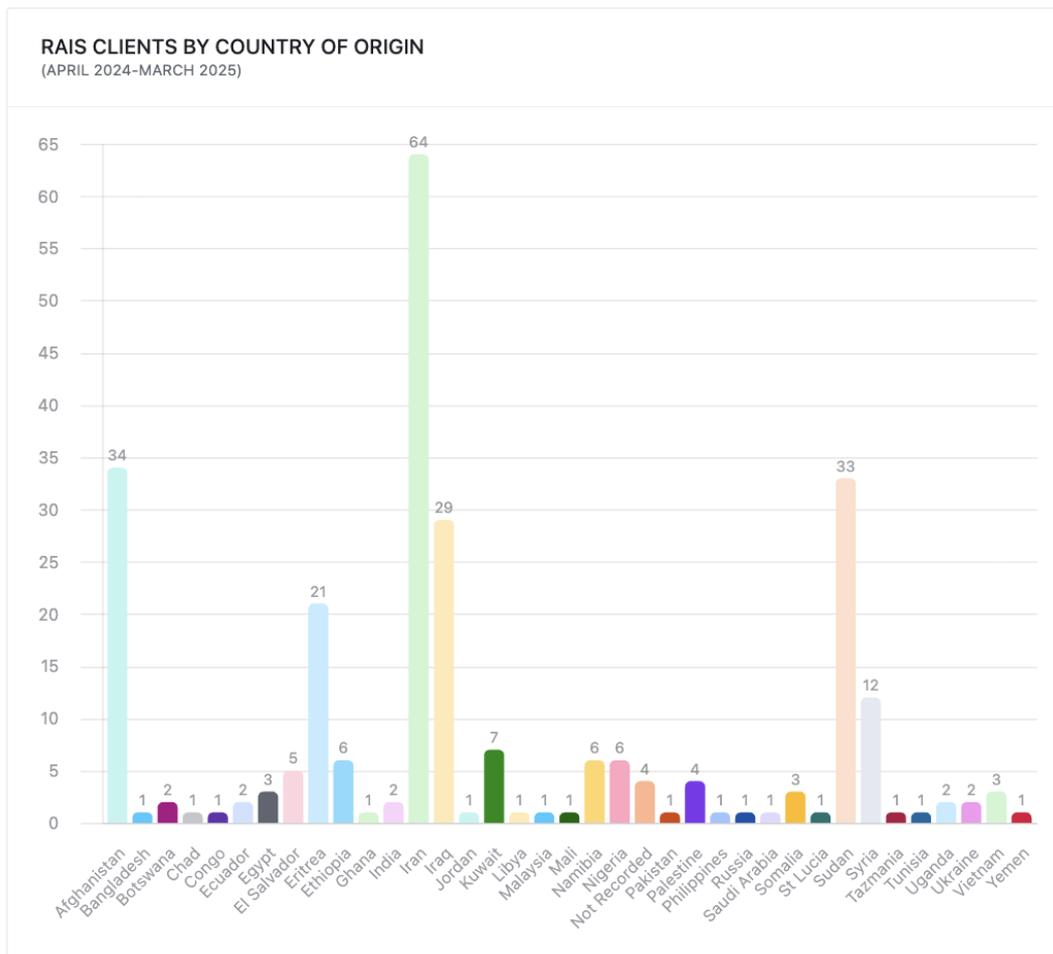
Our female client base is steadily increasing, as more families reunite after being granted leave to remain. Compared to the previous year, our female client base, has increased by 5.5% to 13.5%.



In the previous year there was a fall in client numbers due to the closure of two Serco hotels. Now, over this year, the chart shows a steady increase in the number of people seeking our help. This has been due, in part, to the increase in dispersed Serco accommodation for asylum seekers but also due to the increase in clients being granted leave to remain, and as refugees, settling in the area and seeking our help.



This chart illustrates that a large number of clients return to us for further support, with a total of 63.5% needing long-term help after their initial visit.



This chart shows a breakdown of clients according to country of origin.

2.2 Case Studies

Case Study 1: Moussa

M, an asylum seeker, arrived in Lancaster in December 2023 after living in another city for two years. M had never had a solicitor and had given no evidence for his claim, nor any support from a charity. M had been very socially isolated since being in the UK. M received a negative decision on his claim shortly after arriving in Lancaster. M is a gay man who experienced torture and slavery. We secured a legal representative for his appeal. RAIS completed a referral to Freedom from Torture for a medico-legal report for his claim and requested that his solicitor get a country expert report. We introduced M to local LGBTQ+ community groups which he now attends, and also the local refugee football team, whom he plays with weekly. We also helped M apply for a full-time Plumbing course at Lancaster and Morecambe College. RAIS supported him with getting mental health support. We worked with M throughout his appeal process, liaising with his solicitor and sent medical and supporting documents for his claim. Our Operations Manager wrote a witness statement regarding the client disclosing his sexuality and was prepared to be cross-examined in court by the Home Office. However, once M submitted his evidence to the court, the Home Office overturned their initial decision and granted Leave

to Remain without needing a court hearing. After getting Leave to Remain, however, he ended up homeless once his housing plan fell through. RAIS organised for him to be housed in St Thomas' Sanctuary House while he organised his next steps. He then moved to Edinburgh with friends. M is now living there, working, and recently contacted us to say he is doing well.

Case Study 2: Carolina, Joaquin, Milton

A refugee family experienced homelessness after leaving their asylum accommodation. The family includes four children, and the mother is a wheelchair user. They were placed in temporary accommodation that had a mould problem, resulting in one child needing to attend A&E. With TACU Lancaster & Morecambe, we worked to request that they are moved to safer accommodation, which was granted. They were moved to a hotel. The family are on a very low income; the husband works full-time, and they receive some benefits. Unfortunately, this hotel was far from the children's schools. We requested support from the County Council and schools for support with transport costs, but this was refused. RAIS paid for the children's bus tickets to go to school. While there, we advocated to the City Council for them to be provided with a Discretionary Housing Payment to top-up their rent so that they could afford private rented accommodation. Through the Council, they were referred to Calico and were settled in a rented house they could afford. During this time, we supported the mother with applying for PIP, which was successful, and she received the higher rates for daily living and mobility. RAIS also purchased a new wheelchair for her, as her current one was not suitable for her as she required someone to push her. We have also applied for Carer's Allowance for her adult daughter, who is her full-time carer. Similarly, the mother's brother, also a refugee in our area, was supported during this time by RAIS in finding affordable housing after being granted Leave to Remain. As a man with learning difficulties and mental health issues, we applied for PIP for him, which was awarded to him.

2.3 Volunteer and Staff Training

We offer regular training sessions to volunteers directly. In July 2024, our Operations Manager created an in-depth Volunteer Handbook at nearly thirty pages long. This is a reference and guide for volunteers and other staff to use in drop-ins, with short explanations for topics and contact details.

In October 2024, our Operations Manager delivered a full-day's training to volunteers on an introduction to RAIS and how to do support work for all common drop-in enquiries. In March 2025, our Operations Manager offered a full day's training to volunteers and new staff covering the asylum system, providing legal support, and doing asylum support appeals.

The staff have also received training via Asylum Support Appeals Project, Free Movement, and Lancaster CVS on Volunteer Management and Funding.

2.4 Welfare Fund

In this financial year, our welfare fund assisted twenty-one clients through fifty-nine transactions covering needs such as destitution, transport costs, and other urgent needs. Our welfare fund consists of regular donations and one-off money from fund raising and small grants to meet urgent needs. Records are kept in an online cashbook and reconciled and the transactions validated by our accountants Accounts Matters Ltd of Lancaster.

3. The Future

3.1 Funding

Key Funding highlights from 2024/2025:

1. We have continued to demonstrate agility in response to the government's changing policies and strategies regarding both the asylum seeker and refugee communities. Our support systems have helped our clients apply for asylum while reducing the workload on migration soliciting services. In addition, we have:
 - helped clients who want to learn English, by directing them to local services
 - given support to help clients find housing, apply for benefits, jobs, and education
 - offered financial help in cases of need, with particular focus on food and transport
 - supported clients with medical needs and mental health support when needed
 - accompanied clients to formal interviews when requested.
2. Consolidated new Trustees after the resignation of Founder Trustees and the Chair in September 2024.
3. Successfully achieved funding from the National Lottery Community fund for three years core funding.
4. Successfully achieved a grant to fund all office and drop-in accommodation and training costs for the current year.
5. Explored additional funding opportunities to underpin core funding.
6. Brought further clarity to our anticipated funding needs for the next 5 years. This has resulted in a 5-year business plan, outlined below, which refines and highlights our future funding needs.
7. Increased the number of regular donations and online fundraising donations.
8. Provided an efficient system to recover gift aid from suitable donations.
9. Ensured we maintain the charity's ability to adapt to changing government policies and practice.

10. Eased the burden on local migration solicitors' services by providing more legal support and guidance through our properly trained and qualified staff.

3.2 Objectives for the Coming Year 2025/2026

As well as continuing to provide its core services, RAIS has plans to improve and expand. Below we set out our plans for development for the next twelve months.

1. Being able to provide legal advice

This has proved to be an area of priority need. Time and again RAIS staff and the asylum seekers and refugees we work with are confronted and obstructed by the real absence of a reliable source of legal advice in Lancaster. Because of this, the Operations Manager has been enrolled on the IAA training programme to Level 2 and is due to complete this training by the end of December 2025. This will enable RAIS to give legal advice directly to its clients.

Once the training is complete, there needs to be a period of six months before RAIS is registered with IAA and we can start to provide this advice. During this period, the Operations Manager will collaborate with other members of staff to increase their capacity to undertake case work, releasing her so that she can start to provide advice.

2. Working in Preston

There have been some informal requests for RAIS to expand its drop-in services to the city of Preston, which will have no such service from October 2025. It is not clear at present how RAIS may best help, but staff and trustees from RAIS have started the conversation with Preston City Council and other organisations in the city to explore possibilities. This issue may signify an important development for RAIS. Or it may be something which the organization feels it is unable to help with, but we will be clearer about this by the end of this year. Any extra work we take on will need funding from some source, and this topic will be an important part of our thinking.

3. Exploring funding for future developments

An important part of RAIS' work during this time will be to research funding sources and prepare bids for three priority developments:

- building the capacity of the organisation to provide more case work and legal advice; either by adding further hours to be distributed around the staff team, or by fundraising for and recruiting an extra part- or full-time worker.
- enabling us to hold sessions for women who have come to the UK as part of a family reunion. These women often, in our experience, are isolated and do not come to open drop-in sessions. This work would hopefully be undertaken in partnership with East Meets West.

- adopting a CRM system that will help us record and better analyse the work we do. Work has already begun on data cleaning to prepare for data migration. Alongside this, we plan to redesign our current website to make it more visually appealing, polished, and professional. Providers have already been identified for these and a potential funding source.

4. Work with LGBTQ+ individuals

RAIS has already formed a partnership at a local community centre who will provide a weekly space for LGBTQ+ people to meet at the Centre. These meetings are due to start in the autumn of 2025 with RAIS volunteers and staff, and possibly in collaboration with Lancashire LGBT.

5. Outreach and education

RAIS will remain open to new ideas and projects that emerge from the community; this will include principally restarting the regular dance party in partnership with the Gregson Centre that Global Link previously organised. We are thankful to Global Link for handing this project to RAIS to continue a cross-community celebration of the cultures our clients come from. A lot of the work preparing for this has already been done, and two funding bids are being done currently. This project will add to the series of podcasts, telling asylum seekers' stories, being created with Beyond Radio.

In terms of organisational development, we have completed and reviewed the suite of policies and procedures for RAIS and aim to further strengthen the Board by recruiting new members, in particular ones with lived experience of being refugees and asylum seekers.

3.3 Reserves Policy

We have decided that the annual reserves should be increased by £1000 to £7000 to cover any possible contractual debts. We have a plan to further double the reserves over the next twelve months.

3.4 Financial Review

The charity had income of £115,068 (2024 - £57,912) and expenses of £66,845 (2024 - £53,494). Unrestricted reserves were £20,637 (2024 - £5,520) at the year end.

4. Structure, Governance and Management

4.1 Governing Document

RAIS is an Association Model CIO, registered with the Charity Commission on 15th March 2021. The previous Committee of RAIS, as an unincorporated Community Association, decided to adopt a more formal structure, including incorporation, as the ambition was to grow the Charity, and to employ our first paid worker, in order to deliver a professional and properly regulated service to our users.

4.2 Governance

The Trustees meet four times a year outside the AGM. Once every quarter, to receive accounts and interim reports and discuss new proposals and issues. with an extra meeting prior to the AGM for TAR preparation.

Our Policies

Our current policies and procedures comprise of:

- Bullying and Harassment Policy
- Complaints Procedure
- Confidentiality Policy and Agreement
- Conflict of Interest Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy
- Financial Controls and Procedures
- Financial Reserves Policy
- Grievance and Disciplinary Policy
- Health & Safety Policy
- Lone Worker (Staying Safe) Policy
- Risk Assessment on Lone Working in the Office
- Risk Management Policy
- Safeguarding Policy and Practices
- Social Media Policy
- Travel Expenses Policy (Staff and Volunteers)
- Visitors Confidentiality Agreement
- Volunteer Agreement
- Welfare Fund Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy

All policies were reviewed in October 2025 and approved by the Trustees.

4.3 Membership

RAIS is an Association Model CIO, which means that supporters of the Charity, including donors and volunteers, may, if they wish, become a Member of RAIS in order to keep up to date with our activities and to vote on certain matters. Only Members of the Charity may vote at our Annual General Meeting.

The RAIS Constitution requires only one annual meeting of its members, which is in effect the AGM. It may from time to time call additional meetings or invite members to participate in a consultation or planning event as appropriate. The means of communication for members is via email and meetings are held either in person or on Zoom.

We currently have 30 Members, many of whom were supporters of RAIS before we became a CIO. The trustees recognise that welcoming a wide cross-section of our community as Members is a key way to ensure we are an inclusive organisation and to providing not only community support, but community understanding and empathy for our beneficiaries. The trustees have agreed a process for applying for, approving, and recording Membership.

4.4 Employees

The Charity currently employs three paid staff. Between February to October 2025, we had four paid members of staff.

1. Ms Caitlin Luna, the Operations Manager, whose role includes supervising and running the drop-in sessions, arranging, and monitoring advocacy and outreach work, providing one-to-one advocacy and legal support, as well as networking to create and maintain good working relationships with other organisations.
2. Mrs Carmel Chesire, the Treasurer/Office Coordinator/IT Manager, who manages the office and day-to-day finances as well as consulting with the accountants. She is also responsible for all IT maintenance and development and is a member of the Funding Team.
3. Omar Jouzdan, employed part-time as a Senior Support Worker.
4. Julie Smith, previously employed part-time as a Senior Support Worker.

All staff members are/were funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.

5. Thanks and Acknowledgements

Our grateful thanks are due to our volunteer support workers and interpreters, partner organisations, donors, and funders. We are so proud to be an essential service for those who have been displaced, and to offer a warm welcome to those arriving in our area.

Our grateful thanks are due to the following organisations for their support and collaboration:

- North Lancashire CAB
- Lancaster City Council Housing Dept.
- East Meets West
- Global Link
- The Cornerstone and Lancaster Methodist Church
- Lancaster and District CVS
- Lancaster and Morecambe City of Sanctuary
- The Olive Branch Food Bank
- Morecambe Bay Food Bank
- The Lancaster Hygiene Bank and Food Club
- Collingwood Immigration Services
- St Thomas' Church Lancaster Christ Church Lancaster

A big thank you to our funders:

- 3R Charity
- Eric Wright Charitable Trust
- Garfield Weston Foundation
- Lancaster District CVS - Lancaster Community Fund
- Lancaster District CVS - UKSPF
- Migrant Help
- Morrisons Foundation
- National Lottery Community Fund
- National Lottery Awards for All
- The Hilden Trust
- The Lancaster District Mobility Trust
- Walney Extension Community Fund

And Finally

Thank you so much to all the individuals who have volunteered and/or donated to RAIS Lancaster over the last year. We could not do any of it without you!

As well as a growing number of monetary donations we receive many donations in kind including kitchen equipment, small items of furniture, toiletries, and cleaning materials. We are incredibly grateful to all who donate in response to our appeals.

Approval

The annual report and accounts were approved by the Trustees and signed on their behalf by



Signed – Stephen Thomas, Interim Chair

29.10.25

Dated



Signed – John Chell, Vice Chair

29.10.25

Dated

**RAIS Lancaster
Independent Examiner's Report
For The Year Ended 31 March 2025**

Independent Examiner's Report to the Trustees of RAIS Lancaster CIO

I report to the charity trustees on my examination of the accounts of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2025 which are set out on pages 27 and 28.

Responsibilities and basis of report

As the charity trustees of the company (and also its directors for the purposes of company law) you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006 ('the 2006 Act').

Having satisfied myself that the accounts of the company are not required to be audited under Part 16 of the 2006 Act and are eligible for independent examination, I report in respect of my examination of your company's accounts as carried out under section 145 of the Charities Act 2011 ('the 2011 Act'). In carrying out my examination I have followed the Directions given by the Charity Commission under section 145(5)(b) of the 2011 Act.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination. I confirm that no material matters have come to my attention in connection with the examination giving me cause to believe that in any material respect:

1. accounting records were not kept in respect of the charity as required by section 130 of the Act; or
2. the accounts do not accord with those records; or
3. the accounts do not comply with the applicable requirements concerning the form and content of accounts set out in the Charities (Accounts and Reports) Regulations 2008 other than any requirement that the accounts give a 'true and fair view' which is not a matter considered as part of an independent examination.

I have no concerns and have come across no other matters in connection with the examination to which attention should be drawn in this report in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Signed


.....

Name: Christine Harwood ACMA
Chartered Institute of Management Accountants

Dated: 21/11/2025
.....

Accounts Matters Limited
3-2-1 Storey House
White Cross
Lancaster
Lancashire
LA1 4XQ

RAIS Lancaster
Receipts and payments accounts
For the year ended 31 March 2025

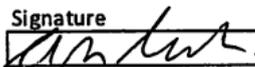
Account	Unrestricted	Restricted	2025	2024
Receipts				
Donations	4,064	-	4,064	4,024
Fundraising	456	-	456	-
Grants	6,550	93,310	99,860	52,501
Legacy Income	10,000	-	10,000	-
Interest Income	99	-	99	70
Sub-total	21,169	93,310	114,479	56,595
Other Income				
Gift Aid Reclaims	589	-	589	1,317
Total Other Income	589	-	589	1,317
Total receipts	21,758	93,310	115,068	57,912
Payments				
Direct expenses	-	-	-	291
Accounting fees	96	1,812	1,908	2,424
Bank Fees	-	2	2	10
General Expenses	-	605	605	-
Insurance	-	296	296	262
Interpreters	350	560	910	1,020
IT Software and Consumables	-	512	512	-
Office expenses	9	2,168	2,177	2,095
Office rental	335	3,685	4,020	3,982
Phones (for asylum seekers)	-	-	-	302
Room rental	90	965	1,055	2,241
Salaries and on costs	7,234	43,290	50,523	36,438
Staff expenses	74	506	580	215
Staff training	-	481	481	-
Subscriptions	-	144	144	132
Volunteers' expenses	34	152	186	548
Welfare fund - fares	-	1,230	1,230	2,996
Welfare fund - general welfare	831	-	831	538
Sub-total	9,053	56,407	65,460	53,494
Asset and investment purchases				
Equipment	268	1,117	1,385	-
Sub-total	268	1,117	1,385	-
Total payments	9,320	57,524	66,845	53,494
Net of receipts/(payments)	12,437	35,786	48,223	4,417
Transfers between funds	2,681	(2,681)	-	-
Cash funds last year end	5,520	11,729	17,249	12,832
Cash funds this year end	20,638	44,834	65,472	17,249

RAIS Lancaster

Statement of assets and liabilities at the end of the period

For the year ended 31 March 2025

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted funds	Endowment funds
	£	£	£
Cash Funds			
Current account	59,128		
Savings account	6,177		
Cash	167		
		732	
Assets retained for the charities own use			
Office furniture	1,032		
IdeaPad	129		
Roller banner	117		
Shredder & printer	315		
Laptops	268	1,117	

	Signature	Print name	Date of approval
Signed on behalf of the trustees		AM MICHELSON	21/

Notes to the accounts

1. The accounts have been prepared on a Receipts and Payments basis as permitted by section 133 of the Charities Act 2011. As the income is not over £250,000 the Charity Commission guideline CC16 for receipts and payments has been applied.

2. The principal accounting policies are:

Income is recognised upon receipt of cash or cash equivalents to which the charity has full entitlements.

Expenditure, inclusive of irrecoverable VAT, is recognised upon payment of an invoice or claim for which the charity

3. The restricted fund movements are as follows:

Grant	B/fwd	Received	Spent	C/fwd
EWCT	90	-	90	-
Grantscape	5,808	4,900	10,708	-
LCF	531		531	-
LDMT	1,265	3,500	1,230	3,535
Phones	776	-	-	776
Morrisons	2,821		2,821	-
Migrant Help	438		438	-
Garfield Weston	-	10,000	8,427	1,573
National Lottery	-	72,910	35,401	37,509
3R	-	1,000	559	441
City of Sanctuary	-	1,000	-	1,000
	11,729	93,310	60,205	44,834