

GATWICK DETAINEES WELFARE GROUP

*Registered Charity No. 1124328*

*A Company Limited by Guarantee registered in England and Wales No. 4911257*

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| **Policy title** | Code of Conduct for Volunteers |
| **Approved by**  **Date** | Anna Pincus  August 2023 |
| **Date reviewed by Board** | September 2023 |
| **Date revision next due** | September 2024 |

As a registered charity GDWG has to maintain the highest standards. The activities of the charity’s volunteers are part of the public face of GDWG and it is particularly important that volunteers should act in the best interests of the detained people and formerly detained people whom the charity serves. Accordingly, GDWG expects its volunteers to adhere to a Code of Conduct and has procedures for dealing with departures from that Code (see separate Volunteer Disciplinary Procedure).

1. **I will read and work within the guidelines, policies and procedures contained in the Visitors’ Handbook.**
2. **I will respect the confidence of detained persons, keeping what they tell me within GDWG, unless they ask me to talk to someone on their behalf or a safeguarding issue is concerned.**

Many detained people have reason to fear what might happen to them or their families if the wrong people discover where they are. They may also have things they want to hide from the authorities or they may simply not like the idea of other people discussing their private lives. It is vital to respect their confidence, and not to discuss or relate their business with anybody outside GDWG without their permission. This includes interpreters, other detained persons, people from their own country, staff at the detention centre and their legal representative. If you are talking through an interpreter, remember that there may be things the detained person does not want their interpreter to know and request permission from the detained person before beginning a conversation with an interpreter.

It is a good idea, if possible, to explain to the detained person that you will not talk about them to anyone outside the group without discussing this with them first. Sometimes people in detention may tell you things that make you feel uneasy, and it is important for you to feel free to talk about this in your local support group or with someone in the GDWG staff team. If a person in detention tells you something that you feel that you need to pass on beyond the group - for instance, that they are under 18, or that they are suicidal or unwell - discuss this with them, and if in doubt consult a member of the GDWG staff team before doing anything. Please also refer to the GDWG’s Guidelines for Visiting Suicidal People in Detention and the policies on Safeguarding Adults and Safeguarding Children. If you are concerned that the detained person is in danger of harming themselves or others, you must immediately contact those listed in these Guidelines including Serco and the GDWG Director who is safeguarding lead for the charity. If it is out of hours and/or you cannot reach us on the office phone, please contact the GDWG Director (07804903157). If you cannot reach the Director, please contact the Chair of Trustees, who can be contacted via Karris (07990113174).

All information held by volunteers on detained persons must be stored safely and securely. It should be deleted from personal email accounts, phones and computers when the volunteer stops visiting or supporting them. If the volunteer feels that the information they have may be useful in the future, then they should send this information to the office for secure filing where the data will be managed according to GDWG policy.

1. **I will be non-judgmental towards the person I am visiting, and all that they tell me.**

Those in detention have come to UK for a wide variety of reasons and have had a wide variety of experiences since they came here. Fascinating though their stories are, it is not our role to decide the merits of their cases, nor to probe or clarify what really happened to them. It is up to them to decide what they wish to tell us. Whatever they do or don’t tell us, we are there to offer support, care and acceptance. This is not always easy: talk to the office staff or other volunteers in your area group if you need support in this respect.

1. **I will treat any person I visit with dignity and respect at all times and try to empower them.**

People in detention have very little control over their lives: they do not even know how long they will be detained. Ways of empowering people include ringing before you visit, so they can say if the time is not convenient; asking them to teach you about their country, culture or language; keeping your promises to them. You may be able to help by liaising with lawyers, or with community groups, but respect the fact that people in detention may not want you to. Always ask before you take action on someone’s behalf, and don’t take anything out of their hands that they may wish to do for themselves.

1. **I will respect people’s religious beliefs, and will not try to convert them to my own.**

The person you are visiting may hold different religious beliefs from you. People in detention may be vulnerable, and may feel beholden to you, so it is never appropriate to try to convert them. Please respect the beliefs, or lack of religious beliefs, of the person you visit or support on the phone. Please do not take unsolicited religious literature into the detention centre without consulting a member of staff.

1. **When allocated a person to visit or support I will visit them every week that they are in the detention centre. However, if I am unable to visit or call one week, I will let them know and contact the office if they would like someone else to visit or telephone in my place.**

The person you are visiting or supporting needs to be able to rely on your visit or support, and on you. Please let the office know if you are not able to visit or support one week and check with the detained person if they would like someone else to visit them or they may prefer to have a phone call with you instead.

1. **I will let a member of staff know when the person I am visiting leaves the centre, and I will inform the office quickly if I am having problems visiting on a regular basis or if I have to stop visiting altogether. I will also complete an online feedback form once I have stopped visiting each detained person or every three months if my visits occur over an extended period.**

Please inform the office as soon as a detained person has been released, transferred or removed. You may well feel you need a break at this point If so, please inform a member of staff when you might be ready to take on a new person to support. If something happens which means you have to stop visiting while the person you are supporting is still at Gatwick, please make sure that the office knows, so that they can reallocate the person you are visiting. Please complete an online feedback form for each person you visit, once your visits to that person have ended or every three months.

1. **I will attend both the training sessions provided by GDWG and my area support group meetings. On any occasion that I cannot attend I will let a member of staff know beforehand, and undertake to read the notes of the meeting sent to me subsequently.**

Part of your commitment as a visitor is to make use of the support the group offers you through training sessions and area group meetings. We provide training in issues related to visiting, the legal process, medical and psychiatric issues and in other relevant subjects. It is also essential that volunteers attend area group meetings: they provide mutual support, create a connected supportive community, provide a chance to discuss issues about boundaries which may arise, give the opportunity for us to support each other, and are a channel for information on changes at the detention centres and in immigration law. Even if you do not feel particularly in need of support, you may have experience and information which would help other visitors, your presence will enable our community to remain connected and enable our group learning.

1. **I understand that I must not be under the influence of alcohol or drugs when visiting a detention centre or when I am undertaking any other activities on behalf of GDWG.**
2. **I will maintain the good relations that have been built up between GDWG and the detention centre, acting in a courteous, patient and polite manner at all times when I am visiting.**

Please be courteous towards the detention centre staff. Your behaviour towards them can affect their relationship both with GDWG as an organisation and with the people we seek to support in detention. If you have any problems, report back to the Director or Chair of Trustees.

1. **I will adhere to the Equal Opportunities Policy and positively act upon it.**
2. **I understand that GDWG’s campaigning activities are limited and that those are the only campaigns in which my participation would be under GDWG’s auspices. If I take part in any other campaigns, it will be in my personal capacity. I will not get involved in any capacity in any campaign to close down Tinsley House or Brook House or demonstrate outside the centres.**

Please respect the fact that we are not a party-political group, and that our calls for change are carefully planned by the staff and trustees. If visitors become involved in campaigns to close down Tinsley House or Brook House this could jeopardise our access to detained persons. Please do not take the media or public figures into the detention centre, or seek publicity of any kind, without consulting with the Chair of Trustees or Director. Please do not take political or campaigning literature into the detention centre.

1. **I accept that if I give my phone number or address to a person in detention, I do so at my own risk. I have had the potential risks explained to me.**

We advise you not to give out your address, as some visitors have had difficult experiences after people in detention have been released. However well you get to know the person you are visiting, you do not know everything about them, and they may misunderstand your relationship with them. You can give the office address instead, and the staff will pass on mail to you. Please also think carefully before you give a detained person your phone number. This can be helpful - as it means that they can reach you if they are particularly anxious and the office is closed - but it may lead to calls after they have left detention, or calls from strangers to whom they have given your number. As an alternative you can give the office phone number.Concealing a mobile phone number is an option.

1. **I accept that it is not GDWG’s policy for visitors to stand bail for the people they visit in detention.**

The detained person you are visiting may ask you to stand bail for them. Please do not do this, for the following reasons:

* You risk losing your money if the person absconds. The detained person may reach a stage where they feel absconding is the only option available to them. This has been the experience of members of GDWG in the past. You must ask yourself how much contact you plan to have with them after they are released.
* You are already contributing your time and energy: we do not want you to feel under pressure to risk your money as well.
* Finally, and most important, if word gets round Tinsley House or Brook House that you are standing surety for the detained person you are visiting, this will encourage other people in detention to put pressure on their visitors to do the same.

For similar reasons we **do not encourage,** **and advise against,** visitors offering **accommodation** to detained people after their release. Volunteers should also not accept bank cards from detained people to withdraw money on their behalf.

1. **I have read and understood the implications of GDWG’s Child Safeguarding and Adult Safeguarding Policies and consent to a DBS check. I agree to take the West Sussex online adult and children safeguarding course. I undertake to inform the Director if I am subsequently arrested, charged or cautioned for any offence or there is a safeguarding investigation about me.** Please note that not all convictions will exclude you from volunteering with GDWG. If you have any concerns, please speak to the Director.

**If you have any questions about any aspect of the Code of Conduct, please contact the Director.**

**Name:**

**Signature:**

**Date:**