

Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group Newsletter, Autumn 2001

Welcome to the autumn edition of the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group newsletter for volunteers. We have received some very useful comments on how to improve this newsletter from you in the visitor's survey. This edition incorporates some of your suggestions and brings you information on how to help a detainee complain if they are getting bad representation from a solicitor and a report from new visitor Don Cooper on the boundaries workshop run by psychologist Maeve Crowley. Also we have an update on the implementation of the new Detention Centre rules at Tinsley House and articles from visitors about detainees they have visited.

Appreciation of a Mum Martin Dore

Azkar Ali has been in Rochester Prison for six months. He was transferred from Tinsley House, where I visited him. Adjudicators refuse him bail because Immigration oppose it. He is locked in his cell 16 hours a day. He has committed no offence, nor is he charged with one. He is a journalist, and a Shia Muslim persecuted by violent fundamentalist Sunni Muslims of the Taliban kind. Immigration still want to deport him to Pakistan, even now. He wrote this to me in a letter:

'What a lovely word is "Mum". In Rochester I have a very respected mum. She is birds' mum of seven children (babies). She is my friend. She is living with her seven children on the



wall opposite my cell. One day I was praying early in the morning. She was carrying, carrying. When I looked out of the window a big bird wanted to eat or take away her babies. Then with a loud voice I cried "Ha Ha!" and threw one biscuit at the big bird and he flew away. The babies' mum had a happy life again. She took the biscuit which I threw to give punishment to the big birds. She was feeding that biscuit to her babies. You see how a creator God sent Ali to help the great Mum! Now they always come wake me up early on my window sill and try talk with me in their sweet language. And God gives me a natural watch to wake me at 5.40am! The whole family come to pay me Good Morning. I also give them respect. The babies can also fly now. These are my best friends.'

Talking about 'Boundaries' Don Cooper

On 11th October members of the different local groups attended Maeve Crowley's workshop on 'Boundaries'. The attendance showed just how relevant the issue was to us all and how much we wanted some reliable guidelines to work to.

Some difficulties

During the first part, the problems tumbled out. For one member it was 'being put in the expert role'. For another, it was 'managing the relationship on release'. The nature of the contract between visitor and detainee, the visitor's feelings when the detainee doesn't maintain the contact on release, handling or responding to the detainee's culture, being clear about the nature of the visitor's role – these were just some of the difficulties that were voiced.

Burn-out

In her response to these anxieties, Maeve Crowley was really helpful. She seemed to be able to put her finger right on some of the risks and vulnerabilities to which the visitor is exposed. She spoke knowledgeably about the possible consequences of listening to harrowing tales. She knew about the way a visitor can sometimes feel that 'I've done all this before', that 'I'm no longer doing any good', 'I'm powerless'. 'I'm on my own'. 'It's become too much'. The burnt-out feeling.

Remedies

Having identified these feelings Maeve Crowley went on to tell us how we can cope. We must acknowledge these feelings. We laughed and we felt relieved when she said that she wasn't a good listener at home; in fact, she said, it was important not feel as if we have to always be a good empathiser in our dealings with people outside the detention centre. It was all right to say 'I'd rather not visit for a while'. It was the quality of our visits, she reminded us, that mattered, not the quantity. When we did feel ill at ease about a visit it was important to interrogate ourselves, to find out why we had the feelings. And it was always important to share our feelings and experiences with the other members of our local support groups. Throughout the workshop, Maeve Crowley emphasised the importance of attending these meetings in order to support and be supported by the group.

The workshop demonstrated the benefits she talked about. We were able to voice our anxieties, discover that we were not alone in having them, and we were able to discover ways of avoiding or coping with them. A valuable meeting indeed.

Maeve Crowley is a consultant clinical psychologist at Horsham Hospital. She counsels detainees with psychological problems at Tinsley House.

Detention Centre Rules Martyn Williams

The new 'detention centre rules' were devised by the Home Office and made law in April this year, with the intention of providing a set of regulations for all detention centres in the UK. These now include Tinsley House, Oakington 'reception' centre (Cambridge), Campsfield House (Oxford), the newly opened Harmondsworth centre at Heathrow and the new 900-bed Yarl's Wood centre which will open soon in Bedfordshire. The rules do

not cover prisons which hold detainees such as Rochester, Haslar and Lindholme, which operate under Prison Rules.

The Home Office has explained that the rules make provision for the regulation and management of detention centres. They provide for matters such as the welfare and privileges of detained persons, their religious requirements, correspondence and health care needs and any complaints they wish to make. They also include security measures such as powers of search and removal and duties of the officers. They outline the duties of the Visiting Committee, who are Home Office appointed volunteers given the duty of ensuring that Wackenhut is following Home Office guidelines in the running of the centre.

The rules include some positive changes for detainees:

Rule 9 states that every detained person must be provided with written reasons for their detention, and thereafter a monthly report from immigration should be provided.

Rule 16 states that 'every detained person shall be provided with toilet articles necessary for his health and cleanliness, which shall be replaced as necessary'. These items are now available on request from the shop at Tinsley, but the toothpaste and shampoo are only 'sample' sachets adequate for one day's supply and the toothbrush is very basic and small. However, we are told that detainees are usually given a handful of sachets.

Rule 27 deals with correspondence and includes a provision which allows detainees without funds to send any 'reasonable number of letters' at the expense of the Secretary of State. Writing paper should also be provided.

Rule 28 states that every visit to a detained person should take place out of the hearing of an officer, except in special circumstances.

Rule 31 allows detainees without funds to make free phone calls ('within reasonable limits') at the expense of the Secretary of State. **We have now been told that phone-cards are available on request at the control room in Tinsley House for detainees without money.**

Rule 35 Requires the doctor to report to the detention centre manager if he is concerned that a detained person is a victim of torture, has suicidal intentions or that their health is likely to be 'injuriously affected' by continued detention. The centre manager must in return report to the Secretary of State. The rule also requires the medical practitioner to 'pay special attention to any detained person whose mental health requires it, and make any special arrangements (including counselling arrangements) which appear necessary.'

Binning Bogus Legal Reps Felicity Dick

The first step towards helping your detainee to deal with poor representation is to assist them with complaining to the right authorities. The introduction of the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) makes this easier. They are keen to get as much information as possible either about immigration advice givers who are outside the OISC scheme (which is

illegal) or those who are within the scheme but acting incompetently.

Who can make a complaint?

Anyone – a detainee or a third party.

Who can they complain about?

Anyone giving immigration advice (immigration consultant, solicitor, barrister) and their employees, except a person working for a government dept.

How to make a complaint

Write to: Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner, Complaints Section, 6th Floor, Fleetbank House, 2-6 Salisbury Sq, London EC4Y 8JX. Forms to help make a complaint are also available from this office (Tel. 0845 000 0046).

What if the detainee has left the country or does not want to complain?

A visitor can complain without giving the name of the detainee.

What should the complaint say?

As much detail as you can. If you are able to give the name of the detainee and details of the behaviour (or omissions) of his legal rep, it is easier for the OISC to carry out a detailed investigation. However if all you can say is that a particular adviser (or his employee), who you name, has acted incompetently, that information will form part of their intelligence when that adviser comes up for auditing and re-registration.

Who will know about the complaint?

The commissioner will inform the person complained about. The Commissioner will not notify the Home Office or the Appellate Authorities about the investigation.

'Petra' Anita Bungaroo

I started visiting Petra (name has been changed), a 26 year-old lady, six months ago. She was softly spoken but had a quiet determination about her. One thing was certain, she did not want to return to her home country.

During my visits, it became clear that Petra had many problems. At first, she told me that she was a Gypsy, married (albeit to a violent man) and had arrived in England hiding underneath the Eurostar train with a group of eight other Gypsies. The effect of her harrowing journey and subsequent detention had made her severely depressed and she had a number of health problems. As a Gypsy she had also suffered in her home country, as this group of people were regarded with contempt and suspicion. She had also been in the hands of an abusive partner, who had managed to knock her front tooth out. So all in all, my first impressions of Petra were of a very troubled lady who had suffered greatly both physically and emotionally.

After about two months of visits, Petra started telling me a different story. She wasn't a Gypsy nor was she married, but she was a lesbian. To begin with, I was completely confused, but as the weeks went by I began to understand who she really was, and why she had lied. Once her identity had been established, she started to talk more openly about her situation. Her life had been

threatened by one of the members of the group with whom she had travelled under the train, forcing her to cooperate with a plan which she did not want to be a part of. She was to say she was this man's wife, or her life would be in danger. On arrival in the UK, she was detained with two of the man's relatives (a 15 and 17 year-old) with whom she had to share a room. (The man in question absconded soon after his arrival). She found living with them intolerable and was scared to change her claim because she thought they would contact their relative. After two months, Petra gave a second interview, changing her claim. She was now no longer responsible for the two children.

We had by now established a good friendship, which meant she could tell me more about what her life at home. She had been arrested on a number of occasions, because of her sexual orientation, and even put in jail for ten days, where she had been mistreated by police officers. She was sacked from work, and was told by the authorities that she would not be allowed to work again. It was at this point that Petra decided she must leave her country.

Up until today, Petra has had three failed bail hearings. There have been many times when I have said goodbye to Petra in Tinsley House, thinking this will be the last time I might see her, only to call the next day and discover she is still there. Two weeks ago I called expecting to be put through to Petra as usual but I was told she had been released. I could hardly believe it. It was a huge relief. I went to her appeal hearing two days later, which went very well, although no decision has been made yet. Whilst Petra waits agonisingly for a decision, I have had time to reflect on the past six months. It has certainly been a roller-coaster of emotion for Petra. She has endured a great deal of suffering throughout her life, and her stay in detention, which lasted seven months, only served to weaken her mental state. As she kept telling me; 'Whether I am alive or dead, it is all the same thing.'

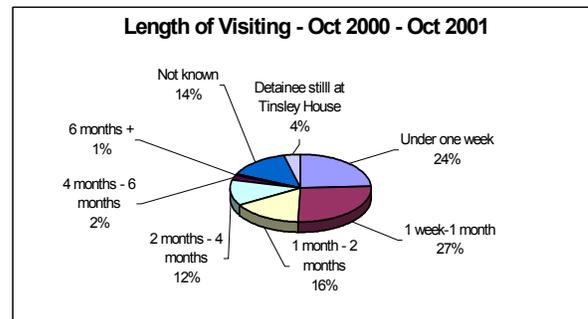
I have learnt so much from this experience. It has certainly strengthened my belief that one human being can help another so much, by just being there. Although I felt powerless to change her situation, I could at least listen to her and show her I cared.

As well as being a visitor with GDWG, I also coordinate the Brighton group which meet every six weeks. Our meetings are a good opportunity for visitors to get together and to discuss things which can sometimes be quite harrowing and traumatic. Each case is unique, and we gain insight into the way the system works by listening and comparing notes with one another. The atmosphere of the group is always friendly and informal. I hope to see a few more new faces there next time! The next meeting is on the 22nd November at 8pm at my house.

Statistical Update Pascale Noel

An analysis of the detainee database has been undertaken for the period from October 2000 to the end of September 2001. Of the 510 detainees that the group has had contact with, 77% are male and the majority fall into the age group 21 – 29. Most (69.22%) were asylum seekers (7.45% were not asylum seekers, of the remaining 23.33% their status is not known). Detainees came from all over the world but the largest groups that we came into contact with were, in order, from Kosovo, Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka,

Romania, Nigeria, Jamaica, India, China and Algeria. Out of the 510, 33% were either removed or deported, 21% were transferred to another establishment, 19% were given temporary admission and 12% bail. The remaining percentage are unknown or are still detained. The chart shows the time visitors spent visiting each allocated detainee.



Art and Craft Sessions at Tinsley Jenny Phillips

I am the art and craft teacher at Tinsley House. It has been a great privilege to work with people from many different countries. I like to think that the craft room provides interesting opportunities for students to use old skills and to learn new ones in a friendly environment where fellowship is also highly valued. The daily task is to adjust the ambition level to the skill level and at the same time provide challenges for the more gifted ones. The ability level in the craft room mirrors the population mix in the centre, which is a variety of economical and cultural backgrounds. The craft room is now equipped for sewing, soft toy making, jewellery making, screen printing, plaster casting, pyrography, silk painting, clay work, stencilling and general drawing and painting. T-shirt printing has been the most popular in recent weeks.



Detention and Asylum News

The Home Secretary has announced sweeping reforms to the Asylum System. Induction centres near Gatwick, Heathrow and Croydon will replace the old system of emergency accommodation. Asylum seekers will stay for up to two weeks, prior to transfer to an accommodation centre. There will be four of these, each housing 750 asylum seekers with full board and lodging. At the centres residents will have access to health care, education, leisure activities, legal advice and interpreters. Neither the accommodation centres or induction centres will be locked. They will be located near towns so that people will be able to

access local services. Removal centres, including Oakington and Campsfield House, will increase capacity so as to speed up the process of removals. The use of prisons will be phased out by next year.

Visitors groups update

‘For almost two years the **London Detainee Support Group** (LDSG) has been running the Former Detainee Project which offers social interaction to ex detainees living in London,’ writes Laura Hurst, LDSG assistant coordinator. ‘Thanks to a group of hard-working and committed volunteers the group meets the first Thursday of every month for a meal and some conversation, to go to see a movie, to go and see a play, to a museum outing or a party with food and dancing. Life after detention can be very hard and lonely. The LDSG has created a space where former detainees can be themselves, share thoughts and concerns, forget their troubles, see that there are some people who care about them and want to help. We believe very strongly that once detainees are released into the community they should be welcomed and given the space to pursue their own interests and to grow. If you know an ex-detainee who wants to see a friendly face and lives in London, you can call the LDSG on 020 7700 0606, and we will invite him/her to our next event.’

The new Harmondsworth detention centre near Heathrow airport opened on the 27th September. There are currently 100 detainees being held at the centre, although over the coming weeks the centre will fill up to its full capacity of 550. The London Detainee Support Group is consequently very busy and have recently advertised two posts for a full time Volunteer Co-ordinator and Manager.

The **Medway Detainees Support Group** will cease to exist in the near future, although it should continue operations until March. This is due to the conversion of Rochester Prison into a young offenders institution. Detainees will be transferred to a converted prison in Dover, which will have 316 beds. A new visitors group is being set up by refugee support organisations in the area. Although not operating under detention centre rules, detainees at the new facility will be in dormitories, not cells, and they will be able to receive incoming phone calls and have freedom of movement within the centre.

AVID Update Helen Ireland

AVID needs help with monitoring the implementation of DC Rules. If there is a visitor who is unable to visit but who might be interested in helping us with this, would you please contact me on 01883 712713.

Handbook for Visitors updates will be circulated soon and include Detention Centre Rules, information on obtaining medical reports from the Medical Foundation, Refugee Legal Centre and Immigration Advisory Service information, Refugee Action Voluntary Return and more. If there are subjects not covered by the Handbook which visitors can identify, please let us know and we will get to work on them.

GDWG Bulletin

GDWG policy on giving phone-cards to detainees may now be reviewed. Because Wackenhut are now giving free phone-cards to destitute detainees, **it may no longer be necessary for us to give phone-cards every week to detainees.** We can instead inform them that phone-cards can be requested from the control room. If you would like to give a gift it may be more useful to give a small amount of cash, say two pounds.

Underwear is now available for detainees on request from the detainees reception desk.

URGENTLY REQUIRED The families social workers at Tinsley House have requested us for help to collect second hand good quality children’s clothes, particularly for 3 to 10 year olds. Donations can be dropped off at the GDWG office or at Tinsley. We also need donations of toothpaste, shampoo, body lotion and shower gel, and warm clothes for the winter to be delivered to the office. Thankyou very much for all the donations that we have already received

Welcome to new visitors Barbara Cortez, Anthony James, Bob Allen (Brighton group), Lavrik Wiersum, Nigel Bagley (Reigate group), Shirley Bridges (Crawley group) and Don Cooper (Oxted group). Thanks for all your efforts so far. We have also said a sad goodbye to Celia Butler and Susie Mills (Oxted group), Sara Phillips (Crawley Group), Madelyn Edens (Reigate Group) and Sue Stewart-Scott (Horsham Group). Thanks for all the time and dedication you have given.

A reminder: Please contact the office promptly if the detainee you are visiting leaves Tinsley House or if you go away on holiday! If you cannot visit for any reason the office staff need to be informed. The visiting commitment is **once a week** during the whole period of detention. Thanks so much for your commitment to visiting over the summer when the turnover of detainees has been so quick and the demand for visitors great.

New AVID visitors handbooks have now been published. If you do not have one they are available through the office.

GDWG Christmas Cards. Only £2.75 for a pack of ten. £1.55 from every pack goes to the group. To buy - or to order stocks to sell - contact Mary Lean on 01883 723152.

Carol Service at Tinsley House. This will be at 7pm on 18th December. You will need to ask the detainee you are visiting at Tinsley to invite you.

Training courses have been organised by Diana Foley for new and experienced volunteers:
November 20th, 7.30pm. Legal issues, UR Church Three Bridges
November 29th, 7.30pm. Medical issues, Three Bridges Free Ch.

Opportunity to do a counselling course. If any visitors are interested in doing a short course in counselling skills then please contact the office (if you have not done so already). We need ten interested participants.

Local Group Meetings

Brighton 22nd November, 8pm at Anita Bungaroo’s house.

Horsham December 6th, ask Liz Cullen for details.

Reigate January 8th, 7.45pm at Ann Locke’s house.

Crawley December 13th, 7.10pm at the GDWG office.

Oxted December 4th, 7.30pm at Judith Louis’ house.