



Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group Newsletter

Summer 2002, Issue 7

GDWG welcomes Lys Gehrels

It has certainly been a busy first month as the new Assistant Co-ordinator of Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group. Besides getting to know how things work in the office and at Tinsley House, I have – amongst other things – attended an excellent AVID Conference, been to the Reigate, Crawley and Management Committee Meetings, helped with the induction of six new volunteers, and held an Introductory Session with Pascale and Felicity, attended by 16 people interested in our group.

I have also had the pleasure of meeting most of you over the last month, and this short piece is above all a means of thanking everyone for making me feel so welcome. (A special thank you goes to the Reigate group, most of whom I met on my first day of work!). It really has been nice to be able to start putting faces to all those names, and I look forward to meeting everyone that I still haven't met. I would also like to take this opportunity to introduce myself 'properly' - rather than over the phone or in the entrance hall of Tinsley House!

Growing up in Tunisia, Ethiopia, Nicaragua and the international city of Geneva (where my father worked for the International Committee of the Red Cross), I have always felt acutely aware of issues surrounding poverty and violent conflict, and the resulting flows of displaced people throughout the world. The legal hurdles and stigmatisation they all too often have to face explain my decision to carry out an MA in 'Migration Studies' at the University of Sussex, with the aim of eventually working for an organisation that addressed these problems directly, based in a host society such as the UK (where I moved in 1996).

In the 'real' world outside academia, meanwhile, I was the Volunteer Coordinator for the Brighton Peace and Environment Centre (BPEC) for over two years. This is a small non-profit organisation run entirely by volunteers that, in addition to a small shop selling books and fairly traded products, provides resources and advice to local civil society groups and the general public, as well as multicultural artifacts to schools. I was also involved in the production of a number of anti-racist educational packs for school children, and was the Editorial Assistant for two academic books, on human rights and the historical conflict in Macedonia respectively.



Finally, I would just like to say how honoured I feel to be working for an organisation such as the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group. I cannot tell you how impressed I am at what this small charity has succeeded in doing over the years, in what are after all such difficult conditions. Working in the office has been an enjoyable (thanks, Pascale!), yet challenging experience. But it is visiting people at Tinsley House that reminds me just how invaluable and essential our work is. Thank you, all, for being such an inspiration, to me but also to others.

Lys Gehrels

Office news

◆ **We're very busy!** Over 300 detainees have contacted us since the beginning of the year. Lys and I are very grateful to be assisted once a week in the office by volunteer Jane Heybrook.

◆ We now have a **free phone number** for detainees – **0800 389 4367**. Please pass this on to the person you are visiting.

◆ The **detainee information leaflet**, explaining about our service, has been translated into 14 languages (Tamil, Arabic, Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi, Farsi, Portuguese, Kurdish, Mandarin, Romanian, Russian, French, Spanish and Albanian). Wackenhut have offered us wall space for a display board advertising the group and a rack for the leaflets. This is just outside the canteen where detainees queue up for their meals.

◆ A new **general information leaflet**, for people interested in finding out more about the group, has been produced by Mary Lean. These will be distributed at the area group meetings.

◆ If you find that you are visiting someone who was at **Yarls Wood** detention centre when the fire broke out, please inform the office. We are in contact with four detainees who still have not been compensated for lost belongings and we are looking at ways that we can assist them.

◆ **Welcome to our six new visitors** Miguel Bravo (Horsham), Doreen Johnson (Crawley), Nicola Collette (Brighton), Andy Mackay (Brighton) Peter Pitcher (Reigate) and Lizzie Storey (Brighton). And a very big thank you to Tadek Jasko, who is leaving the group after four years.

AVID Conference: “Beyond the White Paper”

On 11 May this year, AVID (the Association of Visitors to Immigration Detainees) held a Conference in London, entitled ‘Beyond the White Paper’. Despite being on a Saturday, a number of GDWG members chose to sacrifice part of their weekend to attend – and it was certainly worth it! Indeed, it was not only exceptionally well organised, but provided some very welcome and much needed insight into the most recent changes in asylum legislation, and how different refugee and visitors’ groups have responded to them.

The morning was taken up by a succession of talks by people from across the refugee sector:

- First, **Keith Best, Director of the Immigration Advisory Service**, attempted to make sense of the White Paper’s legal wording, and the negative implications of prioritising ‘deterrence’ over ‘individual human rights’, both for asylum seekers and those working with them.
- This was followed by an inspiring, and more personal, account by **Maeve Crowley** of her work as **Consultant Clinical Psychologist at Tinsley House**. Many were shocked to learn that, as yet, Tinsley House is the only detention centre to recognise the importance of such a service.
- The next talk by **Tim Baster, the BID (Bail for Immigration Detainees) Co-ordinator**, focused on the repeal of Part 3 of the 1999 Act, perhaps the most worrying aspect of the new White Paper, as it no longer automatically guarantees bail hearings for asylum seekers.
- **Faisal Kawali, Director of Communications at the Refugee Council**, then pointed out that the UK’s detention record is worse than any other European country, people being held with little outside scrutiny and all too often no justification, for longer, indefinite periods of time.
- Following this, **Bronwyn Drake, Migrant Helpline’s One Stop Services Manager**, described the organisation’s One Stop Service and Induction Centre in Dover. Whilst the former can be seen as the equivalent of a Citizen’s Advice Bureau, the Induction Centre has a ‘reception’ role. As such, it issues newly arrived asylum seekers with five orientation briefings, gives them a health check, and helps with their NASS application.
- Undoubtedly the most unexpected, and final, event of the morning was the opportunity for members of the audience to question **David Wilson, Detention and Operations Manager for Immigration Services**. Amongst other things, he stated that Yarl’s Wood Detention Centre would re-open ‘in the months to come’, and that, of the 140 immigration detainees currently held in prisons, the majority were being held ‘on criminal charges’. He also confirmed his attendance at the next AVID Conference – WATCH THIS SPACE!

The afternoon, meanwhile, was taken up by three workshops that people could choose to attend:

1. **How to Make a Bail Application – Tim Baster, BID Co-ordinator**
This was a practical workshop, at which people were presented with true case studies, and then required to either argue for the detainee – and the reasons why she or he should obtain bail – or for the opposing Crown Prosecution.
2. **The Changing Role of Visitors – Michael Woolley, Haslar Visitors Group**
This was a more informal workshop, providing the opportunity for members of different visitors groups to raise their concerns, compare their experiences, and discuss strategies for adapting to the recent changes in legislation.
3. **Coping with Short Traumatic Visiting Relationships – Maeve Crowley**
See adjoining article

Coping with short traumatic visiting relationships

This workshop was an opportunity for visitors to examine their motivations for visiting. It was a chance to address concerns about visiting and voice frustrations. Some of the issues that came up, and coping strategies suggested by Maeve, were:

The stresses of short-term visiting can be extreme but the impact phenomenal. The visitor is one of the few people who cares for the detainee and doesn’t have an agenda. You don’t have to be talking about ‘meaningful’ things to be effective. Just being there will sometimes challenge a detainees’ own feelings of worthlessness. Even desperate people have a modicum of hope.

Some coping strategies:

- Burnout occurs when our minimal goals are set too high – have realistic expectations of yourself.
- There is a limit to how much one can burden family and friends – share problems at support group meetings and talk to other visitors.
- Receive hope and energy from everyday living – if visiting becomes your life, then you will have a problem with lack of perspective.
- If you feel frustrated at our lack of ability to effect change, become involved in other activities that work for political or social change.
- Visit a mixture of severe and non-severe cases.

Maeve’s catchphrase - **OPTIMISTIC PERSEVERANCE**. Keep a diary of all the good things that happen when you’re visiting, so that when you’re feeling useless you can look back and recognise the value that detainees attribute to what you do. And **KEEP VISITING!**

If I Could Write to Change Our World.

We who have known misery,
We who have known suffering
We who have known injustice
We who have known abuse,

Let us preach love and unity.

I would write for the children who no longer
have a father
I would write for the children who have known
the horrors of war.
I would write for the uprooted families
I would write for the families of torture
I would write to all those forced to sell their
bodies
I would write for the oppressed of this World,

For there is only one God for all.
Let us preach love and unity.

We who have known misery
We who have known suffering
We who have known injustice
We who have known abuse,

Let us write for love lost
Let us write to tell the world this cannot
continue
Let us write to denounce human
exploitation
Let us write to denounce this new shape
of slavery.

Let us write to change our World
For all those who yesterday condemned evil use
it now.
Where can love of life be found,
In a world where you are born already
condemned?

Let us preach love and unity
Let us preach love and peace
Let us preach love and tolerance.

Blaise Kamga

Blaise, from Cameroon, was detained at Tinsley House for over two months last year and was visited by Pam Spence. He was eventually released on bail and now lives in Middlesbrough. Recently accepted onto a Human Rights Advocacy course, he will be studying in London this summer.

Interview with Father Paul at Tinsley House

Paul Fleetwood has been a Roman Catholic Benedictine Monk since 1974, at Worth Abbey in West Sussex. In addition to his work for the local parish and at Tinsley House, he spent six years in Lima, Peru, during the 1980s and, more recently, four years in the small town of Goias, in the 'centre-west' region of Brazil – and therefore speaks fluent Spanish and Portuguese.



Q: How did you first become involved with Tinsley House and the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group?

A: When I came back from Peru in 1990, I became very involved in Diocesan Justice and Peace work at our local Parish, at a time when asylum issues

were becoming more and more prominent. Upon hearing that a detention centre was being built close by, therefore, a group of us decided to form what is now the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group.

Q: Why did you recently choose to increase the amount of time you spend at Tinsley House, from one day a week to four?

A: This is something I've always wanted to do, and it became possible for me to rearrange my duties in the monastery.

Q: Describe a typical day at Tinsley House...

A: I get a lift in with Steve and Sister Judith, at 7:30am. After a time of prayer with the Chaplain's team, I spend about half an hour studying the current list of detainees, paying special attention to who may have left and who has just arrived. I spend most of the day wandering around the centre, talking or praying with detainees, and have lunch and coffee breaks in the detainee refectory. This is a good time to notice anyone who seems to be alone. Once or twice a week I say mass. I leave at 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

Q: What do you feel is the hardest aspect of your work?

A: Meeting people all the time who are depressed, angry, sad and afraid, and trying to show them hope, love and joy. I find it particularly hard when I meet people who are afraid to go back to a place where they feel their lives will be in danger.

Q: What is the most encouraging thing for you?

A: You meet some very impressive people at Tinsley House, who bring great courage and perseverance to an extremely difficult situation. I also meet many people of very deep Christian and Muslim faith.

Q: The majority of referrals to Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group come from Religious Services at Tinsley House. How do you perceive the role of visitors to detainees?

A: I believe the most important thing visitors can offer is friendship and moral support ... just to be able to show there is someone who is 'on their side', who takes them seriously and accepts them without questioning what they do or say. Of course, visitors also play a very important part in helping detainees with their solicitor, or putting them in touch with the psychology team where needed.

Student workshops on immigration

I have been involved in several talks and workshops on refugees this year. Certainly those I have enjoyed most have been the sixth-form groups. These tend to lack the bland mutual preening of groups, which by definition share similar opinions. Neither do they have the closed attitudes of card-carrying Daily Mail-readers, keen only to counter rather than consider a sympathetic stance.

Immigration with its issues is a theme in many curriculum subjects at AS and A level: in History, they discuss the plight of refugees in Nazi Germany; in French, racism as a continuing problem in France. This, combined with the current level of media attention, means they have usually begun to ask questions and sometimes have their own strongly held views. I ideally choose smallish groups. With 250 Dorking students taking general studies, only the boldest would ask questions and make comments. In a Brighton sixth-form college, I spoke to about 25 of the Politics Society, where students were less inhibited. They prompted lively discussions on compulsory English-teaching for immigrants and a unified European approach.

I think it is a credit to our often criticised education system that many teachers really do succeed in celebrating rather than denigrating diversity, and that children are encouraged to develop their own values and judgment. Also, whilst adults meeting someone black, disabled or gay often cannot see beyond a single characteristic of such massive social resonance, teenagers more often see it as one among many. It is their knack of seeing refugees as whole human beings which is so valuable.

Anna Seddon

Giving talks and organising exhibitions is a good way to increase awareness of our work and the plight of asylum seekers in our community. It is also a way of raising our profile to potential funders. Please contact the office if you are able to help in this way.

New members of the Management Committee

Welcome to 2 new members of the Management Committee who were co-opted on the 6th of June – Kaltun Hassan and Veronika Horska.

Kaltun lives locally and is the Communications Co-ordinator at the Refugee Arrivals Project. RAP is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that provides quality humanitarian assistance and support services to new applicant asylum seekers and refugees. Through its work, RAP seeks to influence the development of refugee policy for all asylum seekers and refugees.

Veronika is from the Czech Republic and is the Deputy Co-ordinator of Witness Service in Brighton, a branch of Victim Support. She has been visiting with the GDWG since December last year.

Christmas Cards

For the last four years, Chris and Elisabeth Bell have helped us to raise money for the group and to promote our work and awareness about asylum seekers through designing and printing our Christmas cards. Thanks to their generous rates, we raised £750 last year. The Bells have now moved out of the card business, and Mary Lean would like to give up handling the promotion and distribution. So, if we want to have a card this year, we need to find:

- a designer who will let us use their work
- a printer who can offer a competitive rate
- a volunteer to distribute the cards

If you can help, please contact Pascale or Lys at the office, or Mary on 01883 712856.

Bulletin

- **We would be extremely grateful** for donations of the following: toiletries (especially toothpaste and shampoo), good quality summer clothes, jeans and trainers.
- **AVID AGM** – will be held on 8th July, 6–8 pm at Portcullis House (nearest tube: Westminster)
- **Racial Justice Sunday** is on September 8th. The Church's Commission for Racial Justice have produced a resource pack (£3) tel: 020 7523 2121 to order.
- **Local Support Group Meetings:**
Oxted – Tuesday 2nd July, 7.30 pm, Christa's house
Brighton – Wednesday 3rd July, 7 pm, St George's Crypt
Crawley – Tuesday 9th July, 5.30 pm, GDWG office
Reigate – Monday 15th July, 7.30 pm, Ann's house
Horsham – To be arranged

Refugee Week 2002

Refugee Week celebrates Sanctuary and is now in its fifth year – Pascale and Lys will be attending the following events if you would like to join us.

For a fuller list of events visit www.refugeecouncil.org.uk or contact the Refugee Week Team on 020 7820 3055:

- My life as a Refugee – Premiere of a film about a young Afghan man living in London, struggling to escape poverty and establish a life in exile – School of Oriental and African Studies, Vernon Square, London, 21st June at 7 pm. Tel: 020 8340 4661 to book.
- Refugees and Conflict – a lecture by Clare Short MP – Royal Geographical Society, 20th June at 6 pm. Tel: 020 7436 1333 to book.



