



# Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group Newsletter

Spring 2003, Issue 9

## GDWG online

**March 2003 sees the launch of GDWG's website. The address is: [www.gdwg.org.uk](http://www.gdwg.org.uk)** The site's aim is to promote our work and act as a useful point of contact for volunteers. We will continue to develop the site over the coming months, including images and adding resources for GDWG volunteers. For those who do not use the Internet, all of these resources will be available from the office as usual. Please note that, although the website has a new email address that visitors to the site can use to contact us, [gdwg@gatwickdetainees.freemove.co.uk](mailto:gdwg@gatwickdetainees.freemove.co.uk) will continue to be the main office contact for GDWG volunteers.

## On the frontiers of a needy world

*Mary Lean (GDWG Vice-Chair) visits Switzerland, and finds a network of volunteers supporting asylum seekers.*

Switzerland has one of the highest per capita asylum application rates in Europe. The issue of asylum is a hot one. Many greet the phenomenon with fear and suspicion, particularly when asylum seekers are placed in small rural communities. In December the town of Meilen hit the headlines with a proposal to bar asylum seekers from most public amenities and from parts of the city. After an outcry the plans were relaxed. As in Britain, the voices of fear and reaction often drown out those of welcome and support – but the networks of volunteers across both countries testify that the louder voice is not telling the full story.

My hostess, Brigitte, oversees a plethora of voluntary relief and befriending initiatives. One of these is ARAVOH, a group of 70 volunteers set up in 2000, when the Federal Government opened a reception centre for asylum seekers (CERA) in Vallorbe (population 3000). Last year 11,000 asylum seekers passed through CERA, which is where applicants are

processed before being dispersed. They remain here for up to two weeks, receiving full board but no cash. They are allowed out into the town for a couple of hours each day.

ARAVOH's volunteers take it in turns to man a tiny drop-in centre and second-hand clothes store in the town. This morning Rene, a town councillor, is dispensing coffee and a listening ear, while Jacqueline, a nurse, is coping with the run on warm clothes caused by the snowy weather. Karine pops in from the legal advice centre next door to give new arrivals lists of contacts. Her work is a bone of contention with the town council, which is threatening to withdraw funding if ARAVOH continues with it. Coffee and sympathy are acceptable, apparently; helping people to win their asylum cases is more controversial.

Later in the day I am taken to visit the detention centre itself. The atmosphere is more relaxed than Tinsley House. Although I am told there are 20 police in the basement, their presence is not obvious, and the staff at the centre do not wear uniforms. The major problem is boredom – other than ping pong and football and informal prayer groups, there is nothing for the residents to do.

After leaving CERA, asylum seekers are dispersed to other parts of the country. In nearby Lausanne, two groups run drop-in centres for people in the city, and there are also projects for children and students. Last Christmas, over a hundred families invited asylum seekers into their homes. Brigitte has received anonymous letters asking what she is doing for 'poor Swiss people'. She replies that she helps whoever comes to her. She also tells the story of 'Jean', from Congo, who helps an old lady as a Red Cross volunteer. This isn't an exceptional case, she insists. 'Lots of young asylum seekers would like to do something, but the doors are often shut. People are afraid, mistrustful. What a shame! It could be the beginning of friendship, sharing...'

Mary's full article can be found at [www.forachange.co.uk](http://www.forachange.co.uk)



*CERA Reception Centre*

# HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Human trafficking is the fastest growing and third largest criminal activity in the world, and UN figures suggest that 200–300,000 women are trafficked to Europe each year. In March, volunteer Anna Seddon convened a seminar around this theme, as sometimes we visit people whom we suspect have been trafficked, or we are told so explicitly. The day covered a lot of ground, but this article focuses on the problems faced by women trafficked for prostitution, as this is the group that we are most likely to come into contact with.

## Definitions of human trafficking

We began with a working definition of human trafficking, as distinct from human smuggling. The United Nations defines it as the transportation of people with intention to exploit them, using deception, intimidation or coercion. It is often accompanied by violence or threats of violence. 'Exploitation' includes prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

We then looked at some of the economic and political factors that underpin the trade in human beings. Trafficking is most often the recourse of the very poorest women, from areas with few employment prospects and where political instability is rife. Common sending countries are the former states of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, Albania and West Africa.

Trafficking has clear links with drugs and organised crime, but what marks it out is the hold traffickers have over their victims. Women are often sold by a family member or someone close to them. Many are sexually assaulted and sold up to 10 times en route to their destination. They are often sold for vast amounts of money, which they must then repay.

## Problems faced by trafficked individuals

Trafficked women face many barriers to re-integration. Besides the traumatising psychological effects, they may require urgent medical attention due to sexually transmitted diseases, HIV, pregnancy or physical injury. If sent back home, they may also face stigma, reprisals, and the dangers of being prostituted or re-trafficked by the original gang.

## Current UK legislation

Unlike drug trafficking, there is little adequate legislation to prosecute human traffickers and it is therefore a low risk / high gain criminal activity. Prosecutions are more likely for pimping or immigration offences, rather than the more serious human rights violations of rape, assault or imprisonment. The Metropolitan Police are currently looking at increasing intelligence-based investigations relying on surveillance, rather than on victims' testimony. Women who escape their traffickers are usually removed from the UK as illegal immigrants, and prosecutions in countries of origin are rare.

## Presentation by Lynne Chitty

*Senior Practitioner, Brighton Child Asylum Team*

Lynne's team has responsibility for unaccompanied minors arriving at Gatwick Airport, who have been trafficked for criminal and sexual exploitation. As women can be sold for up to £19,000, traffickers are not likely to give up this investment easily. The safe house Lynne's team overseas is staffed 24 hours a day. Security and vigilance are high: all telephone calls are monitored and girls are escorted everywhere they go.

66 West African minors have gone missing from West Sussex Social Services' care since 1995. In response, a joint Social Services, Police and Immigration investigation was launched – Operation Redbridge.

But although evidence was gathered to link the disappearances to trafficking, the Crown Prosecution Service could not support a prosecution due to insufficient legislation.

Lynne talked about the hold traffickers have over their victims. For Eastern European women, this is usually achieved by violence and intimidation, whilst West African women are often controlled by 'juju', or black magic. The effect this has should not be underestimated. Victims are left emotionally and physically scarred, and terrified that they and their families will become sick or die if they talk about what has happened to them.

West Sussex Social Services have drawn up a profile of trafficked minors, which is now part of their child protection procedures and used to train immigration officers, to facilitate early detection.

- Usually between the ages of 16 and 28, and of West African origin - most commonly from Nigeria (especially Benin and Edo States), Sierra Leone and Liberia.
- On arrival they are anxious and distressed. They have often been given a phone number to call as soon as they arrive.
- They frequently say they are older than they look and make little eye contact.
- Interest may be shown by suspected perpetrators or alleged 'legal representatives', and family members may attempt to make contact.

## Our role as Visitors

The hold that traffickers have over their victims means that people may be reluctant to talk of their experiences. As visitors, we are unable to offer solutions but can give people some options, and of course emotional support:

- Building up trust - it is important to let a detainee know that you are not there to judge and what they say is kept in confidence. People may not necessarily want to take action, but need support nonetheless.
- The office has an extensive directory of organisations both in this country and in sending countries that can assist trafficked women. This is also available online: [www.antitrafficking.org](http://www.antitrafficking.org)
- The Home Office is piloting a project offering safe accommodation, medical treatment, counselling and legal advice to adult victims, on condition that they give evidence against their traffickers. Contact the office for details.
- Please be vigilant if you are visiting someone in this situation, especially when liaising with legal representatives or friends and family. Always give the office details as a contact.
- None of us are experts; so if you learn something new, or hear of useful contacts for victims, please let the office know so we can pool our resources.

For more information:

*'Human traffic: from Moldova's villages to Britain's massage parlours'* - article from the Observer magazine in February. Contact the office if you would like a copy.

[www.antislavery.com](http://www.antislavery.com) - sign their Stop Human Traffick petition, which is urging governments to develop measures to protect the victims.



## GDWG News

■ The beginning of the year has been extremely busy, with 208 detainees requesting the group's help so far. A third needed help finding a solicitor, and many requested toiletries and clothing.

■ **Thank you for all your patience whilst the turnover is so high at Tinsley House. If you can let us know in advance the days that you are available, this will help us to respond as quickly as possible to detainees' requests for a visitor.**

■ BID's bail notebook is now available to download from their website – [www.biduk.org.uk](http://www.biduk.org.uk). Copies are also available from the office. Visitors Jane Heybroek and Judith Louis are available to help detainees who need assistance in using the notebook.

■ **Welcome to six new visitors: Paolo Boldrini, David Varonesi, Dominic Ramos, Parissa Betzer (Brighton), Brian Crawford (Crawley) and Carla Serato (Reigate). Between them they speak Spanish, French, Italian, Persian, German and Portuguese.**

■ We are pleased that new volunteer Cally Paddison has taken up a student work placement position with us and will assist on a Tuesday in the office.

■ **Tours of Tinsley House have been arranged for 16<sup>th</sup> April at 2pm and 23<sup>rd</sup> April at 4.30pm. Contact the office to book a place.**

■ **Counselling Course:** a full day training course run by the Sussex Education and Training Consortium has been set for Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> of May, 9:30am – 4:30pm, at Three Bridges Free Church. A maximum of 12 people can be accepted, on a first come first served basis.

## News from AVID

■ The AVID AGM will be on the 31<sup>st</sup> May, 10.30 – 4 pm @ Vaughn House, London.

■ Best Wishes to **Ben Lloyd-Shogbesan** who is leaving the post of Co-ordinator to work with refugees in the community. All contacts to AVID should be through Helen Ireland, tel: 01883 717275.

## Visiting is about ...

When first I met Amar he wanted to know if I was a solicitor. I said I wasn't but Amar, who has perhaps 50 words of English (including 'solicitor'), didn't understand. When Amar learned (through another detainee who spoke his language) that I wasn't a solicitor he wanted to know what I was doing, why I had come. I explained that I had come to visit him, just to visit him. No, there was nothing (besides a solicitor) that Amar wanted. Nevertheless, yes, I could visit him again.

At our most recent visit, when Amar came into the room and saw me and Christa, also a visitor, he waved to us, he smiled at us. He pointed to the table where we were to sit. He still seemed to have those few words, but the deficiency of language didn't seem to matter much, if at all. He'd say 'Amar all right. Papa and mama here'. We'd nod and grin, and he'd grin in return, taking a hand if he wasn't already holding one. From time to time we'd put a simple question to him. Amar would draw upon his vocabulary and reply. That we understood or not was neither here nor there. The three of us were talking to each other. We were at ease. When Christa and I left we knew little more about Amar's circumstances than we knew when we arrived, but we did know that he had enjoyed our company and that we had enjoyed his.

Amar reminds us that visiting is about visiting someone, about talking with someone for the time that it takes to visit. Simple really. Visiting is about visiting. That's what it's about.

*- Don Cooper, East Grinstead group*



### TINSLEY HOUSE COMPLAINTS PROCEEDURE

Wackenhut have asked us to clarify their complaints procedure for detainees or visitors wishing to complain about a member of staff.

They ask that visitors do not write directly to the centre management, but address complaints through the GDWG office. Alternatively, visitors can ask to see the Operations Manager, Dave Hill, whilst they are in the visits room. He will discuss with you and the detainee how the situation can be resolved and how to proceed with a formal complaint.

Making a complaint will not affect a person's immigration status. Information about how to complain is available in the 'House Rules', which detainees can obtain from Detainee Reception at Tinsley House. Please do not hesitate to contact the office with any queries.



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