



Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group Newsletter

Autumn 2005, Issue 16

Plans afoot for 'Gatwick 2'

The Operations Manager at Tinsley House has confirmed rumours that the Gatwick Airport Authority and Immigration are in discussions about building a new detention centre at the airport. The 400-bed centre, currently code-named 'Gatwick 2', would be built 300 yards down the perimeter road from Tinsley House. It seems that no agreement has yet been reached and no further information is available at time of going to press but the local MP has pledged to look into it. The news is somewhat puzzling, given the fact that Tinsley House has been operating at reduced capacity throughout 2005. We will of course keep visitors posted as and when more details are available.

Lobbying the Labour party

GDWG and the Haslar Visitors Group jointly hosted 'Meet the Visitors', a fringe event at the Labour Party Conference in Brighton. Thank you to all the volunteers who gave up their Sunday evening in order to participate.



The immigration minister, Tony McNulty

Labour Party delegates had been invited to come along and find out more about detention but we had no idea who – if anyone! – would attend. However, there was a respectable turnout; guests included Crawley MP Laura Moffatt, Portsmouth MP Sarah McCarthy Fry, Refugee Council Parliamentary Officer Jonathan Cox and a BBC journalist. But the big surprise of the evening was when Immigration Minister Tony McNulty walked through the door.

Volunteers took the opportunity to put their views across. Education, which would help people to integrate more easily, is lacking in detention argued Anna Seddon. At Tinsley there is just one English Language teacher, who has to cope with the greatly varied levels of English among detainees (not to mention the transient nature of people's situation!); why not expand the English Language programme? In addition, for those whose mother tongue uses a non-Romanic alphabet, literacy classes are surely a requirement to ensure that language classes are accessible to all; currently, no such classes are given. Given this lack of basic skills education in detention, how are those lucky enough to be released expected to fulfil the Labour Party's requirement that they integrate? McNulty however maintained that it was important to strike the right balance with regard to detention centre activities; after all, he added, people shouldn't be having too good a time while they're detained.

However, he did agree with Felicity Dick when she raised the question of initial decision-making. She put to him that when so many initial negative decisions on asylum claims are overturned at appeal, it hardly inspires confidence in the system. McNulty agreed that this stage in the process needed addressing. Outcomes of the event include an assurance from the minister that he will allocate some of his time to meet with the Haslar Visitors Group when he visits that detention centre later in the year.

Ursula Smith

NEWS

Incentive scheme

Immigration and Global Solutions are proposing an 'incentives scheme' for detainees – along the lines of what would exist in a prison. All detainees entering the centre will be put on 'Standard Level' and if they are still in the centre after 7 days, and have demonstrated good behaviour, will be promoted to 'enhanced level'. Typically this might mean they are allowed certain privileges such as an extra £3 telephone card, the opportunity to purchase a wider range of goods in the shop or an extra free letter. This is still under discussion so we'll keep you posted.

Internet & Computer training

No date has been set for the installation of the internet at Tinsley but it has been agreed in principle. Unfortunately, usage will be restricted to detainees who've been in the centre longer than one week, and only if they have demonstrated 'good behaviour'. Computer training is however currently available to all detainees throughout the day. They need to register with Mike the Librarian in the classroom upstairs in the centre.

Visits to Tinsley

The security company have offered to take two small groups of volunteers around the centre on 31st Oct (11am) and 2nd Nov (2pm). Please let the office know asap if you are interested.



Tragic Deaths

September was marked by the tragic death of an Angolan asylum seeker at Yarlswood detention centre.

Manuel Bravo took his life in front of his teenage son, shortly after being picked up from their home in Leeds and threatened with removal from the UK. Less than three months earlier Ramazan Kumluca, a 19-year old Kurdish detainee, hung himself at Campsfield detention centre after six months in detention.

These tragic deaths remind us of the enormous pressures detainees are under at all stages of detention. The consultant clinical psychologist for Tinsley House, Maeve Crowley, will be holding a 'Suicide Awareness' training session for visitors on October 20th (see back page for details). We hope you can join us.

Thank you to all our friends, supporters and former detainees who attended our tenth anniversary event in June and who helped to make it such a memorable evening.



Actor & writer John Bird led the celebrations

Introducing the new office team

It was a sad goodbye to Lys this summer, who's moved on after three years as the group's Assistant Coordinator, but we're delighted to welcome Ursula Smith as her replacement and Jessica Gustavsson in the newly created role of Detainee Support Worker. Here they share some of their first impressions.

Ursula Smith Assistant Coordinator

Having not been a visitor myself before starting this job, I imagined that the majority of people in detention would be overstayers, people who had come into the country illegally or asylum seekers whose claims had no real substance. Those who had experienced torture in war-torn countries would surely, I assumed, be allowed to stay here. I had heard that there was something in law about the "right to family life", and optimistically thought that this would mean that families separated by detention was rare. Sadly – and I'm sure this will come as no surprise to long-term visitors – the reality so far seems to be very different.

Countries which people are currently sent back to include Afghanistan and Togo despite this being against UNHCR/Amnesty recommendations. One lady, who had been beaten and sexually assaulted by several armed men in her own

"I am still in a state of disbelief"

home, was even put through the fast-track system. The last I heard, she was awaiting removal. It makes you wonder what sort of experiences *are* considered to merit a successful asylum claim.

The significance of the "right to family life" is questionable, with detainees frequently separated from siblings, spouses and children. One man who had been at Tinsley House for months applied for bail shortly after the birth of a new baby; his application was refused. One woman has not seen her small children since being detained in July. Many have been removed, not knowing when, if ever, they will see their families again.

Much of this may sound familiar to those who have been visiting for a while already, but I think I am still in a state of disbelief. I haven't even mentioned those who go on hunger strike or who self-harm to avoid being sent back to the dangerous circumstances they have left behind. Articles about our "weak rules on citizenship and asylum" and "lax borders" (*Daily Mail* 31/07/05) are simply misguided and offensive; it is frightening to think about how many thousands in the UK read literature of this kind.

Support group meetings have helped: being around other people who know what is going on, who feel strongly about the same issues and can relate to those feelings of frustration and powerlessness when there's little we can do help. I have met most volunteers now, and look forward to meeting others soon; forgive me if I'm still a bit slow on names!



Ursula, Pascale and Jessica strike a pose

Jessica Gustavsson Detainee Support Worker

As the detainee support worker, I spend most of my time talking and listening to detainees mainly over the phone. Before joining the office crew, I was a volunteer visitor for a year. This was one of those experiences that leaves you amazed

at what you could have missed out on, the people you would otherwise not have met. This feeling has only intensified since I started working in the office.

Working with detainees opens up a secluded world. In many ways, entering Tinsley House feels like entering a sub-world, where time is standing still but at the same time ticking away out of reach of many detainees. Most people will never come into contact with this world, or hear the stories I hear. I am quickly reminded however, on my way home from work as I pass the newsagent, that I'm in a clear minority.

Sadly, I think it's the case that most people are quite happy not to think too hard about what the papers actually say. The papers, and not just the tabloid press, tell everyone that there are too many people coming to the UK asking for asylum. For some time now this has been an accepted 'problem' – presented as a strictly practical one of *numbers*, which requires a practical solution: detention and eventual removal. This way of thinking can only make sense to someone who is detached from what is actually at stake, namely human beings. Hence, the government triumphantly declares that the numbers asking for asylum have gone down. Equally, we are told of numbers of people removed from the country last year – but not that many people were forced onto a plane, often to a dangerous place, and that we just don't know how many of those were detained or killed upon arrival.

"Most people will never come into contact with this world, or hear the stories I hear"

This way of presenting something so controversial as something entirely pragmatic and logical, I find terrifying. Because I know that the real consequence of this detached policy is suffered by the people I speak to every day. In my view, it never was, or ever will be a question of numbers.

A visit to the palace....

Truly, 2005 was a remarkable and eventful year for our group. It held its tenth anniversary celebration in June and, after being awarded the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, received an invitation to a royal garden party at Buckingham palace in July.

The invitation to the palace was a modest recognition of what this group had done, and is doing, in providing relief and giving hope to those detained at Tinsley House. The group was represented by four people – a member of the Management Committee, a staff member and two volunteers. The day was fine and sunny, quite fitting for a royal party. On arriving, we found that there were already long queues. This was shortly after the July London bombings and therefore identity documents were critically scrutinized. Ours were in order, so we were let in.



Simon Ndazi (Reigate Group) outside the palace

MORE CELEBRATIONS

The Roman Catholic Bishop of Arundel and Brighton wants to celebrate the work of two charities in his diocese which have won the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. One of course is us and the other is the St. Richard of Chichester Christian Care Association.

The celebration will take the form of a service which will reflect on God's call to serve our neighbour. It will be interdenominational and open to everyone of all faiths and none. It would be wonderful if you could come at 5.30p.m. on Sunday 30th October to Our Lady of England Priory, School Lane, Storrington. Refreshments will be available after the service.

Felicity Dick

My first impression after entry into the palace was the big open ground behind those palace gates, in fact the space was big enough to hold a football match! Tea was served in the second open ground further on. There the visitors could mingle with the other 8,000 guests. One could identify army officers of different ranks (some perhaps just returned from Iraq), Lord Mayors in their dignified chains of office, diplomats in their national dress, saris and turbans could be seen here and there, and clergymen and clergywomen were all there enjoying their cups of tea. I had a chat with one clergyman who told me that his being invited to that party was a present from his bishop, who forwarded his name to the palace. The priest had served for forty years. That immediately jogged my memory that GDWG had not done too badly for its ten years existence!

There was adequate time for a walk-about. We visited the flower gardens, which were surrounded by trees and plants, as if we were in the countryside, rather than the centre of London. We then waited for the royals to appear. They did, and had a walk-about chatting to some of their guests. Then it was time to leave. Mission accomplished. It was futile to look for a taxi, so we decided to walk back to Victoria Station. It is only a few minutes walk, but that seemed a punishing exercise for the high heeled! However it was endured in good spirit.

Simon Ndazi

VOLUNTARY RETURN

Most detainees are desperate to remain in the UK and are appealing against a decision to return them home. However, there are some for whom return may be a viable option. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has recently extended its voluntary return programme to detainees and this has been met with a cautious welcome from refugee groups.

The scheme means that people who are in detention and, crucially, without imminent removal directions, can opt to return to their country voluntarily rather than facing enforced removal. The programme offers assistance with a one-way ticket. Once someone has been repatriated, they can apply for 'reintegration assistance', to help them access job training, education, employment or a grant to set up a small business. It's unclear how many detainees will be eligible for the programme, given the fact that many have already been served with removal directions., however, IOM told us that they are happy to discuss with any detainee what their options are, and will prioritise the allocation of a caseworker to visit them.

There's the worry that detainees are under too much strain to make a clearheaded decision as to whether return is safe – in particular if they have been held for months on end without prospect of release. There is also the concern that detainees may be coerced into signing up for return, without being given the chance to fully weigh up the pros and cons. We recommend that anyone considering this option should speak to the Choices project at Refugee Action. They offer confidential advice to people thinking of voluntary return and provide information about the political climate and security situation of countries people are thinking of returning to.

IOM: 0800 783 2332 / CHOICES: 0207 654 7700

My Time in Detention

I was put in detention last September after I finished a seven-year prison sentence. From that point on it's been absolutely hell.

Living in this place not knowing when you are going to get out is really terrifying to the mind. And this is how I spend my days: Wake up in the morning at 08.00 for breakfast after that sit down and look at the TV for about an hour then go the library and read the newspaper for about an hour then after that I go to the gym after that I take a shower, that's how I spend the morning. In the afternoon I have lunch, then I might look at the TV for a while, then go to sleep, some times that is. When night comes in this place I will have a dinner at 6.30 then I will look at the TV or talk to people until 11.30 when they tell you to finish off so they can lock the gates – after that it's bedtime.

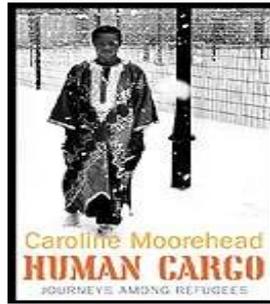
Put it this way, I get bored in this place but I know I got to cope, to get by. The phone calls do help a lot. Let's just say its not nice being locked up at all and I wouldn't wish this on my worst enemy.

Sean Bryan

Book Review

Human Cargo

By Caroline Moorehead,
336pp, Chatto, £12.99



Canada through resettlement schemes. The ambiguity of these schemes becomes clear in the story of Sudanese Mary and her family who are invited to live in Finland, a country which is otherwise wary of accepting refugees. So it is felt that Mary and her family should feel extra grateful for this charitable act.

Moorehead travels from Cairo and Sicily, to the California-Mexico border and to the darkness corners of Finland.

On her journey she speaks to refugees and asylum seekers, government representatives, host populations, border police and help organisations. *Human Cargo* is a collection of those encounters and we follow refugees on their journeys into exile. However, as Moorehead shows, arriving in relative safety is pretty useless unless people are allowed to create a meaningful existence for themselves.

The book starts off in Cairo where many refugees find themselves in a state of limbo. Here the UNHCR has been mandated to carry out interviews to establish who is and who isn't a refugee. For the lucky few, who have been granted the desirable 'blue card' by UNHCR, the hope is to be invited to go and live in Australia, the US or

Despite the well-meaning local population and the activities organised by the municipality, Mary and her fellow Sudanese refugees struggle to make a worthwhile living in the darkness and the cold of an unknown country and soon descend into depression, joining half of the local population.

Many of us will recognise the stories in Moorehead's book. They tell of shattered dreams, humiliation and despair at being detained and shipped off to some remote island off Australia's coast. Increasingly, asking for asylum has become less of a right and more of a privilege, with the effect that the notion of 'refugee' has become a state of imprisonment.

Have you read anything that you think would be of interest to the rest of us, and would you like to share it?

Jessica Gustavsson

What visitors do when they're not visting

I started visiting in 1999 after working overseas as a teacher most of my working life.

In Uganda I was involved with refugees from Sudan, and later, when in Sudan, with refugees from Uganda! I have a nine-year-old Sudanese refugee goddaughter.

I eventually came to live near East Grinstead in 1994 and joined GDWG.

I'm a member of the local Justice and Peace group and get a lot of practical help for GDWG, and keep them up to date with asylum and immigration issues. The group organises services for Homelessness Sunday (and a sleep-out) and for One World Week. I have been involved with Felbridge Primary School since I moved here, first helping with reading, then with teaching about Kenya. For the last seven and a half years I have been a Governor.

In East Grinstead and Lingfield we have a group called CARE, which helps people with shopping, small jobs like gardening, and transport to doctors, dentists and hospitals. Once a month I am a Duty Officer manning the phone to take requests from clients and finding volunteer drivers to take them. As we have fewer drivers than we really need I recently decided to become a CARE driver too!

East Grinstead is becoming far more multi-racial than it was when I first came to the area. I belong to a church which is outward-looking – with links in Uganda, Nigeria, Argentina and China, and I keep in touch with news from Kenya, Uganda and Sudan as much as I can. With the addition of the detainees I visit, I feel I am in touch with quite a lot of the world!



Barbara Cottier

AND FINALLY...

DESPERATELY SEEKING

If you know anyone doing away with an office chair, we can give it a good home. We'd also be grateful for any donations of maternity clothing.

BAIL HEARINGS

Detainees often tell us it's reassuring to see a friendly face at their bail or appeal hearing. If you're visiting someone who'd like support and you can't make their hearing, let us know and we'll see if another visitor can.

CALL FOR ARTICLES

Please let us know if you've got any suggestions about what you'd like to see in this newsletter. Also, if you're visiting someone who'd like to contribute, or you can spare the time to write an article yourself, even better!

Diary dates

GDWG events

20th Oct 'Suicide Awareness' training with consultant clinical psychologist Maeve Crowley (Free Church) 6.30pm

30th Oct Service led by Bishop Keiran Conry in celebration of voluntary work (see p.3 for more details)

8th Nov 'Legal training' for visitors (Free Church) 3pm

15th Nov 'Core training' session for new visitors joining the group, although old hands welcome! (Free Church) 6pm

Other things of interest

19th Oct BID PUBLIC MEETING
The meeting will focus on two key areas: the rise in deaths in immigration detention in the UK and the policy of removing refused asylum seekers to dangerous countries such as Iraq, Zimbabwe, Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda. The aim of the meeting is to share views, ideas and strategies for action.
St James's Church, 197 Piccadilly, London W1J 9LL, 6pm

3rd-4th Nov JRS TRAINING
The Jesuit Refugee Service are offering a two-day training course for anyone who 'Attends to the needs of detainees' Contact 020 7357 0974 for more details