



Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group Newsletter

Spring 2008

225 Three Bridges Road Crawley RH10 1LG

registered charity no. 1053730

GDWG News

Brook House

As you are probably aware, a new detention centre will soon be opening at Gatwick, approximately half a mile beyond Tinsley House on the South Perimeter Road. The exact details of when it will be opening and how it will be run are yet to be made public, although GSL, the company who operate Tinsley House, are the 'preferred bidder'. We will be expanding our services to offer support to detainees at the new centre, and have just secured funding to take on another member of staff to help do this. We will also need to recruit new volunteers, as well as thinking of new ways to source increased quantities of clothing and toiletries. This year will clearly bring great challenges for all of us, but also the opportunity to assist even more detainees than before.

Clothing update

We're still in desperate need of men's clothing. There is a high demand for clothes from detainees at the moment, and as a result we are taking in about 30 parcels a week! If you happen to be passing the office on your way to visit, please give us a call to see if we have any parcels ready to be taken in. This would help us to reduce our carbon footprint!

New GDWG volunteers

We will be recruiting again over the next couple of months. The initial introduction sessions are to take place on 12 and 13 February. If you know anyone who would like to volunteer, or if you are able to assist in interviewing applicants, please contact the office.

2007 statistics

We assisted 563 detainees last year, of whom 40% were visited by one of our volunteers. In the first month of 2008, we have already been in touch with 75 new detainees. A full breakdown of the 2007 statistics will be available at the AGM.

Life After Detention

What happens to those released?

Much of our time is spent trying to help detainees to find representation with a view to securing release from Tinsley House. Detention is clearly detrimental to people's health and wellbeing, and almost all detainees we support are desperate to be released back into UK society. Detainees often ignore the issue of what awaits them upon release, or at most regard it as of secondary importance.

So what does happen upon release? We asked two former detainees who we supported during their time in Tinsley, to tell us their stories.

A came to Tinsley House in the middle of last year, after a short spell in another detention centre following a year in prison. While in Tinsley House, he was seriously depressed and had numerous flashbacks to the torture he had endured back in Africa. He was finally granted bail and released after more than six months of detention.

At first A found it very difficult to fit back into life in the outside world. For the first few days he found himself missing the people whom he had left behind at Tinsley House, and feeling angry that they were still there. He also struggled to get some structure back into his life. A told me, "When I was detained, I felt like a tamed animal. Everything was on a timetable, they told me when to sleep, when to eat. When I was released, I didn't have this any more. I needed to mix with people to get out of this, but I didn't want to tell many people that I had been locked up. I was worried about the stigma, about what they might say about me." A said he just kept his head down and got on with things.

After a while, however, things started to improve. He managed to move out of his cousin's house where he had been staying, and was reunited with his wife and children, who had been living in another part of the UK. He now feels that he has something to look forward to, and takes heart from the fact that the experience has made him stronger. "I asked myself many times if I would be the same person I was before," he says. "Suddenly though you find a new perspective. You must have faith and belief. There must have been a reason why I survived all of the things that have happened to me in my life."

A went on to tell me that GDWG's support had made him think that if these strange people thought he was worth saving, then he must be. This realisation was a source of comfort and strength to him during his period of detention. Although this time had been incredibly difficult, he felt that he had come out the other side a better and stronger person.

F has been in the UK since January 2001. He claimed asylum, but was given a final refusal in 2004. Up until that point he had been allowed to work, and found a job in an off licence. However, after his appeal was dismissed, this right was taken from him, and he was left dependent on the support of his friends. He was detained twice last year, firstly doing a week in Colnbrook, where he was locked into a cell for twenty three and a half hours a day, and then transferred to Tinsley for ten days. He was out for a couple of months, before being put back into Tinsley again, this time for two months. In between these periods he was released on Temporary Admission. He had three separate Judicial Reviews at the High Court, and was unfortunate enough to get the same judge each time, who has a reputation for being very harsh, and who ruled against F on all three occasions.

However, F got himself a new solicitor, who made an application to the European Court, and as a result he was released on TA again. As part of the conditions, he has to report once a week, and is also tagged, having to be in his house twice a week for electronic monitoring. F told me that while he suffered greatly while in detention, being released has also brought an enormous amount of problems. He is wholly reliant on a friend, whose house he lives in, and who also gives him one meal a day. Most days this is all he eats, as he has no other money. He has other friends, as well as an Aunt in this country, who all do their bit. However, he says this leaves him feeling very unhappy, as he wants desperately to be allowed to work, so that he can look after himself. F told me, "When I eat, I always think that this is someone else's food. I did not earn this food, it was given to me." He also told me that being kept in limbo is, "killing me slowly." He does have some hope though. One of his friends who was detained for a year has recently won his appeal, and been granted refugee status. "One day", F told me, "I would like to return to my country, if it is peaceful. But for now I just want the chance to make a peaceful life for myself here."

Pilgrimage to Mecca: my once in a lifetime journey...

My wife and I left on 10 December 2007 and spent three weeks in Mecca, which is where the Kaabah (the house of Allah) is, and also the direction in which people face to pray. We spent the rest of the time in Medina, which was the home of Prophet Muhammad. We really enjoyed the journey and would love to go back again in the future. The weather was beautiful. It was 34°C in Mecca and about 20°C 400 km away in Medina.

The most important part of the journey was the five days from 17 to 21 December, during which you have to do certain acts at certain places between certain times. This means that there are approximately 4 million people in one place at the same time! The most important day is the day of Arafah. Arafah is the place where everyone will be gathered and questioned on the day of judgement. The day of Arafah consists of prayers and supplications.

During the days of hajj all men have to wear two garments called the Ihram. Whether you are rich or poor, short or tall, black or white, you have to wear these garments. In practical terms this a statement that you make that when you are standing in front of Allah you are all equal. No wonder Malcolm X was overcome by this when he went on hajj in 1964.

The women can wear what they want but have to perform the same duties as the men. Throughout the journey my wife and I performed all of the duties together. There are exceptions for the sick and the elderly.

The people at the hajj were all united in the one goal of fulfilling the duties of hajj. Just as I met different faces and different races there, I have come back to help the different races of people here.

I have been very brief in writing this article however if anyone did not fully understand something or has a question please feel free to speak to me.

Tanvier.



Want to be a McKenzie Friend?

With Video Bail Hearings coming to Tinsley House early in 2008, it will no longer be necessary to travel to Taylor House to give moral support to a detainee facing a bail hearing. If you would like to be involved in helping detainees at bail hearings, we invite you to join AVID's training for McKenzie Friends.

A McKenzie Friend is an assistant with no official legal status who sits with a litigant in court, to help as a friend. If a detainee is representing him or herself in court and has no solicitor, a friend beside them can be a tremendous source of

confidence. McKenzie Friends cannot address the court unless invited to speak by the Adjudicator or Judge. However, they can take notes, offer occasional quiet non-legal advice, find supporting documents for the Adjudicator or Judge and prompt a detainee to ask certain questions.

Detainees who have used McKenzie Friends have found their help sourcing legal forms and templates for submissions extremely useful. They have said that McKenzie Friends are often more able to interpret the body language of the Adjudicator than the detainee who is more emotionally involved. If there is a break, a McKenzie Friend can talk through what has happened so far with the detainee.

The next AVID McKenzie Friend one-day training will be on Saturday 8 March in London. The training covers court

procedures, preparation for a bail hearing, preparation for an appeal hearing and assembling a chronology and evidence gathering.

And the name 'McKenzie Friend'? The original McKenzie Friend was an Australian barrister whose qualifications in law in Australia did not allow him to practice as a barrister in London. In 1970 he helped Mr McKenzie who could not afford legal assistance and didn't qualify for legal aid. Please let us know in the office if you would like more information about training as a McKenzie Friend or if you would like to attend the next AVID training course in March.

Anna

TINSLEY HOUSE IMB

We recently met with Anne Sherwen and Merle Campbell from the Tinsley House IMB. There have been a few people leaving and joining the IMB in recent weeks, so we took this opportunity to discuss ways that we could co-operate more fully with each other to ensure that conditions in Tinsley House are monitored and any complaints are investigated.

The role of the IMB

IMB visits are unannounced and occur at least once a week. Members have access to all parts of the centre and are identifiable by their distinctive armbands. Their duties are to hear complaints from detainees and staff members, and to feed back to the centre management, contract monitor and/or Home Office if the Detention Centre Rules are not being upheld. They also have a responsibility to visit detainees held in segregation.

The complaints system

Detainees can pass on complaints to the IMB in two ways. They can either speak to them directly, and in private, when the IMB member is visiting the centre. Alternatively, they can use the complaints box in the centre, to write down the details of the complaint, or simply to ask the IMB member to come to speak to them when they are visiting.

How we can be involved

Anne and Merle invited us to pass on any concerns about any detainees of whom we think the IMB should be aware directly to their Chair, Charles Ijaz. We can also ask them to raise any more general issues at their monthly board meeting. Following this meeting, they take any pertinent issues directly to the Tinsley House management.

If visitors have any concerns that they would like to address to the IMB, please direct these through Nic.

Book on detention – Border Country



Melanie Friend, Senior Lecturer (Photography) at the University of Sussex, has produced a book of photographs of detention centres around the UK, including Tinsley House (see above). The book also comes with an audio CD of interviews with detainees, giving their stories and their views on detention. These stories will sound familiar to many of you who have visited immigration detainees. She has exhibited the photos in Belfast, and has upcoming dates in Winchester and London. The book will be on sale at the GDWG AGM in March, with 50% of the cost donated to us. It is certainly a tough provoking read, so please do buy one if you can. For more information, or if you would like to have a look at the book, please contact the office or see www.melaniefriend.com.

Meet Catrin, one of our new visitors

How did you discover GDWG?

I 'found' GDWG after a chance meeting with Abbot Christopher! I had previously been an Asylum Support Officer for Surrey County Council, where I knew Nic Eadie, working with young people recently arrived in the UK. As I had a passion for human rights issues, and a curiosity to discover what happens at the end of the asylum process for someone whose claim is unsuccessful, I decided to volunteer.

Working for SCC, Catrin carried out age assessments. She has harrowing stories to tell of children being trafficked to the UK and found on the doorstep of the office, as well as moving stories of young people fleeing danger and trekking to safety.

Can you tell us how it feels to be a new visitor?

I feel part of a group with a very positive ethos and feel inspired to be participating. The first time I went to Tinsley House, it was like entering a prison at the gates but my impression actually softened inside partly because the staff were very friendly. The first detainee I visited had been a carer for his blind mother before he was detained and was thankfully released on bail on Christmas Eve. The detainee I am visiting now would be an excellent role model if allowed to stay and his return would be the loss to the UK of a hard-working person with great dignity.

Catrin overflows with stories of travels throughout her life, first on world tours with her actor father, mother and two sisters, and then as a flight attendant, after studying film and lighting in New York. She has flown ever since, most recently with United Airlines, and takes every opportunity (and there are many!) to explore the localities and village life near to the places where she stays. She has balanced family and flying with taking an International Relations degree and MA in Rural Development at Sussex and then working as a visiting teacher for Action Aid. Today she fits family and GDWG around flying, speaks with commitment about the work of Amnesty International and Compassion in World Farming and describes herself as a 'world citizen'.

Welcome to GDWG, Catrin!

Section 4 Support Applications

Section 4 is also known as 'Hard case support'. It is for people who have exhausted all their asylum appeal rights but are unable to go to their home country. It is a limited and temporary form of support, available for asylum seekers who have been unsuccessful in their claim and those who are detained under immigration powers but have not claimed asylum. If you are 'destitute' (homeless or without money for food) or going to be destitute if you are released from detention, you can apply for Section 4 accommodation provided by the Home Office.

You will not be able to choose the location you are moved to and you will have to stay at this address unless you are authorised to move. Section 4 support is usually a room in a house or flat and supermarket vouchers but no cash. The accommodation is self catering. In exceptional cases, full-board accommodation may be provided depending on availability.

As visitors, we are allowed to assist detainees in making Section 4 applications. In order to get bail, a detainee must have an address to go to, so if they have no friends or family to stay with, then a Section 4 application must be completed before any bail application is made. The form is very simple, and only takes a few minutes to fill out. It is merely a case of supplying details, ticking a few boxes, and writing two short statements, the first to demonstrate that the detainee has no other support available, and the second to give any additional information, such as the reasons why removal is not imminent, medical issues or details of dependents.

The office is happy to give you some further guidelines, or alternatively we can go into Tinsley and assist the detainee in completing the forms if you would prefer.

Welcome to our new volunteers!

- **Alison Austin and Alison Lockwood (Brighton)**
- **Jennifer Tindle and Joanna Humphreys (Reigate)**
- **Catrin Ingham (Oxted)**

CRB FORMS

PLEASE COULD ANYONE WHO HAS RECENTLY BEEN SENT A CRB FORM, AND WHO HAS NOT COMPLETED IT, DO SO AS SOON AS YOU CAN.
THANK YOU!

Some thoughts from the Chair

When I was asked to write a piece for this newsletter I admit I struggled. Not because I am not proud to be chair of trustees but because you, who are likely to read this are so well informed and committed. My, nearly, first year as chair has convinced me of what an amazing group of people are involved in GDWG. When Pascale decided not to return to us as Co-ordinator after maternity leave I was daunted by the prospect of finding a successor. However, we were blessed with good candidates, and I was with Iyadh Daoud and Doreen Johnson, two very able fellow trustees, on the selection panel. The result was Nic Eadie who has already proved a great asset. He, Tanvier and Anna are a team to be proud of.

Attending meetings and listening to our volunteers I am struck by their compassion and commitment. I don't mean just the old lags like me but new volunteers on their first tour of duty.

I must also mention Felicity Dick, a tough act to follow. She is such a hard worker and with her new fundraising hat on she has excelled. We have just been offered £100,000 over 3 years from the Department of Health to support detainees at Brook House when it opens. This is good news though I am saddened by the thought of all those who will be detained there.

We will have a lot to do in the coming year.

John Barrett – GDWG Chairperson
February 08

Dates for your diary...

8 March - McKenzie Friends training, London.

26 March - GDWG AGM, St Barnabas Church, Worth Rd, Crawley. 7.30pm.

29 March - AVID AGM, St James' Church, Piccadilly.

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