

Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group Newsletter

Autumn/Winter 2008

No Place for a Child

The end of the detention of children?



The UK government has finally removed the reservation which enabled it to opt out of the UN Charter on the Rights of the Child when it came to immigrant children, treating them as asylum seekers first and children second. This move comes as pressure builds on the government to abandon the detention of children entirely, with a high-profile campaign in the *New Statesman*, in conjunction with BID and the Children's Society.

In total, more than 2,000 children are locked up each year in detention centres in the UK. There is a growing body of evidence that detention can cause weight loss, depression, anxiety, bedwetting, insomnia

and difficulties relating to other children. These bad effects can continue long after the child has been released.

So far this year, we have supported 38 children detained with their parents, as well as 27 young people whose ages the Home Office are disputing. The facilities for children in Tinsley are fairly limited. There is only a small area for families to live in, and the children's play area outdoors is not large and is close to the only area where detainees and officers can smoke.

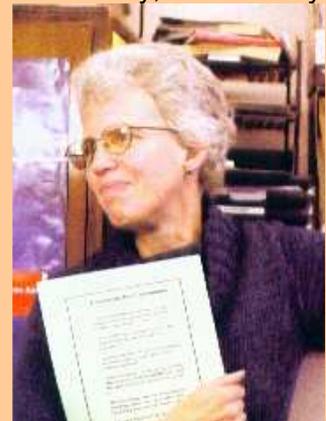
At the moment it is unclear what the government's decision on the opt-out will mean in practical terms. Children are still being detained, but we hope that the momentum will continue in the right direction. The Home Office has been piloting different schemes as alternatives to detention, with mixed results, and no firm conclusions as of yet. More information on the BID and *New Statesman* websites.

Nic Eadie

We wouldn't be where we are today if...

We wouldn't be where we are today if it was not for Mary Lean. Mary joined the group in 1996 as a Visitor and has carried out almost every role within the group since then. In the spring of 1997 she became Volunteer Coordinator – this was an unpaid post then which she held for year, whilst continuing her normal work as an editor. As the number of detainees needing help increased, the Volunteer Coordinator's job could not be done part-time and we took on a full-time paid employee. Mary carried on visiting but also became a trustee, holding posts of Vice Chair and Secretary, and performing the crucial role of supervisor of the Coordinator from 2000 until Pascale left in 2007. Mary managed the production of the booklet 'Where Do I Turn' which celebrated the first 10 years of the group.

Mary has done all these tasks with skill and dedication. But I think her main importance to the organisation is the advice and good sense she has offered in many difficult times. This has been invaluable to the trustees and to me when I was Chair. We will miss Mary's wisdom and her amazing sense of humour when she moves to Oxford next year. Good luck Mary, and thank you!



Changes afoot?

The new draft Immigration and Citizenship Bill

In July this year, the government published a partial draft of what they hope will become a new, all-encompassing Immigration and Citizenship Act. It will simplify matters by replacing most immigration legislation since 1971. They hope to introduce the complete Bill to Parliament early in 2009, and gain royal assent sometime around October. Before this happens there are a number of opportunities for concerned groups to challenge the Bill.

As well as bringing together a lot of what is currently in force, the Bill makes some new, and worrying, proposals. These represent a step back for the rights of refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants in this country.

The Refugee Council outlined four main areas of concern in its response to the draft Bill:

- The partial nature of the Bill means that a number of significant areas have been missed out, such as asylum support and the role of the higher courts in immigration matters.
- The Bill will make it more difficult for recognised refugees to achieve indefinite leave to remain and it will extend the time they have to wait for this.
- The Bill will cut down the parliamentary scrutiny of changes to immigration law, make it much easier for the government to make alterations.

- The Bill will limit, and in some cases completely remove, the rights of certain groups of people to appeal against negative asylum decisions.

The most worrying changes in relation to detention concern bail. The Bill will allow the Home Office to reverse an adjudicator's decision to grant bail if the person concerned has no appeal outstanding, and their removal is 'imminent' (which is how the Home Office describes almost every detainee's circumstances). It will give the Home Office the power to impose far more rigorous bail restrictions than an Asylum and Immigration Tribunal adjudicator and allow them to require sureties to pay money upfront, rather than committing to pay should the detainee abscond, as at present. Finally, the Bill would make the breaking of bail

conditions a criminal offence. This means that an asylum seeker could be jailed for up to 51 weeks for failing to sign on.

The draft Bill is currently in front of the Joint Committee on Human Rights, and a number of groups have made submissions expressing our concerns. As an individual, you can write to your MP. You can also complete the public scrutiny questionnaire on the UKBA website, although the questions are loaded in a way that pushes you towards the answers UKBA wants. There is further information on both the Refugee Council and ILPA websites.

Nic Eadie



Words from inside Tinsley House

We had the pleasure of visiting Mansour Mohammadi in Tinsley House and the privilege of reading his poetry which he wrote with a musical setting in mind. Mansour is happy to share his writing with GDWG volunteers. Thank you Mansour!

I'm broken like a boat, on the waves of the sea
I'm alone, tired, helpless and hopeless, on the sea

When, my tall stature, was broken by the sea
How can I tell my problem, I don't know, to the sea

In between my turmoils, struggles, and worries
I heard, shouting, crying of the seagull, on the sea

Although my wings are broken, by the powerful hurricane
I remain faithfully devoted, and the honour to the sea.

The hurricane said to it, you do not have the wings
Why're you remaining faithful, and veracious to the sea?

The seagull told the hurricane, life is kindness, happiness
Be brave and learn goodness, you have a look to the sea

Look broken boat is sadness, rambler, wanderer
But it has its trust on, is hopeful to the sea

Although the burrowed pearl is in the being of the shell.
But all of its honours are charming with the sea

Oh Sepehr, this life may be bad, good, ugly, pretty
Be clean, pure, limpid, and pellucid, like a sea.

(Note; Sepehr Javidon is Mansour's nom de plume. Mansour has since been transferred to Colnbrook)

Meet Stewart Mutero, our new trustee...

Stewart Mutero brings first-hand experience of being detained at Oakington to his new roles as a GDWG visitor and Trustee. Stewart, who gained refugee status in 2003, was detained on arrival in 2002. Although he had family in the UK who helped him 'from the outside', he remembers his period in detention as a time full of emotional pain, fear, and deep uncertainty.

Stewart grew up and studied in Harare, Zimbabwe, where his father still lives. He taught in a primary school in a remote rural area and feels that the close sense of community he witnessed there contributed to his strong sense of social responsibility. Stewart is now settled in Crawley with his wife and young daughter and since 2004 has worked with young adults with learning difficulties, helping them to achieve independence. In 2007 he obtained a law degree from Kingston University, specialising in immigration law, civil liberties and human rights. He also volunteers for Crawley Citizens Advice Bureau and is training to be a CAB legal advisor.



Stewart describes his visits to Tinsley House in terms of the friendships he has made with African detainees. He has a strong sense in the visits room of sharing a common understanding with the men he visits. He speaks Shona, which is a great asset to the group. We hope that other members of the Zimbabwean community in Crawley will consider volunteering for us. Welcome to GDWG, Stewart, and all our good wishes to you and your wife for the birth of your twins in a few months' time!

GDWG News

Anna has been working hard on producing some 'UK city information packs', designed mainly for detainees who are released into Section 4 accommodation, and who are wholly unfamiliar with the cities they find themselves in. The packs contain general city information, as well as contact details for local organisations who may be able to offer support to former detainees. Should your detainee be applying for bail, and is given a Section 4 address in Leeds, Newcastle... please let the office know, and we will deliver a pack to them.

The BID notebook on 'How to get out of detention' is now available on their website in Farsi, Arabic and French. They are also working on a Mandarin version, which should be available soon. These booklets are designed for detainees to use to prepare their own bail applications, but are also very useful for visitors who would like a better understanding of the process of applying for release.

Nic and Felicity recently met representatives from an anti-trafficking organisation called STOP Trafficking. Should you be visiting a detainee who you suspect may have been trafficked to the UK, please let the office know, and we can make the appropriate referral.

GDWG has recently been awarded exemption at Level 2 by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC.) What this means is that Nic is now able to give basic legal advice to detainees, including advice on how to prepare bail applications. Please let us know if you think your detainee is in need of help, although we are not allowed to actually represent clients at bail hearings.

Medical Justice have made a written representation to the Joint Committee on Human Rights, who are currently scrutinising the new draft Immigration and Citizenship Bill (see main article.) It is an interesting piece, and can be viewed on their website, www.medicaljustice.org.uk

The Home Office have confirmed that the only Zimbabweans who are now in detention are those who have served prison sentences, and have been assessed as unsuitable for release due to being either a threat to the public and/or likely to abscond. Forced removals to Zimbabwe are currently suspended. Should anyone hear of any Zimbabweans in detention, please inform the office, who will then refer them to BID and AVID.

The new GDWG website should be currently being designed, and should be online within a few weeks. Watch this (cyber) space!

A big thank you to Patricia Nickson for her continued support of the group.

Book Review by Anna Pincus; New Londoner; Reflection on home

A coffee table book with a difference! Not just a charity book or a refugee book but an art book too! The charity PhotoVoice takes people who are frequently viewed with pity through the camera lens and empowers them by placing the camera in their hands. *New Londoners* is a collection of photographs and stories by refugees aged between 13 and 23, from ten countries of origin. They were mentored by photographers.

22-year-old Bajram from Albania writes: 'I lived with an Indian family and I had never seen people eating with their hands before. After a while I got to know about these cultures and I came to respect them. Once you get over the strangeness of the difference you understand how many things are the same.' Mazee, aged 17 from the Democratic Republic of Congo, writes, 'I feel like a shadow with my real body in my home country.'



Chalak, 18, from Kirkuk in Iraq, writes, 'The photos show how my thoughts are. Always in twos, for every happy thought an unhappy thought. For every time I think of being here, I think of there. Wanting to be here but missing there.' He places a tear-soaked view taken through a rain-drenched coach window next to a picture of Nelson's Column in bright sunshine with an English flag beside it.

In his introduction, Hari Kunzru points out that the photos are 'proof that the photographer was in a certain place at a certain time, which is another way of saying that these pictures are memories – and when you have memories of a place, you're beginning to put down roots'. The photos enrich the viewers, just as participating in the project enriched those who took them. PhotoVoice hopes that we will also be moved to help bring about change.

How British are you? The British Citizenship Test

Since last year everyone who applies for permanent residence must pass the British Citizenship Test, which was originally brought in for people applying for UK naturalization. The Home Office estimates that 100,000 people take the test every year, and says that its purpose is to test candidates' preparedness to become citizens, rather than to assess their ability to understand history.

The test involves 24 multiple-choice questions, which have to be answered in 45 minutes. Before entering for it, individuals must prove that they are proficient in English and are encouraged to read a document called *Life in the UK*.

Red Squirrel Publishing, who devised the test, tried a sample version out on 15,000 Facebook users. Of these, 11,118 were British – and only 14 per cent of them passed. The editor of Red Squirrel Publishing commented, 'What these statistics show is that walking into the test without proper preparation is a recipe for failure – even British nationals struggle answering many of the questions.' Many regard the test as a glorified English comprehension test.

It is not easy to see how the questions asked relate to being a 'good citizen'. One ex-detainee asked why it was necessary for him to learn how many people have used illegal drugs, when the first census was, or of what percentage of families in the UK are step-families?

We tried taking a sample British Citizenship Test in the office. Some questions provoked a debate: others hilarity. We thought you might enjoy having a go at the five sample questions below.

1. Life in the UK says to be British means you should...
 - A. "Respect laws, the elected political structures, traditional values of mutual tolerance and respect for rights and mutual concern."
 - B. "Share in the history and culture of an island nation with a character moulded by many different peoples over more than two thousand years."
 - C. "Be part of a modern European democracy, one with a tradition of sharing our ways with the world – and allowing the world to bring its ways to us."
2. Almost 60 million people live in the UK. By what factor do the native-born English outnumber their Scots and Welsh neighbours?
 - A. By nine to one.
 - B. By seven to one.
 - C. By six to one.
3. There are four national saints' days in the UK, one for each nation. Which order do they fall in the calendar?
 - A. St Andrew's, St Patrick's, St David's and St George's
 - B. St David's, St Patrick's, St George's and St Andrew's
 - C. St George's, St Patrick's, St Andrew's and St David's
4. According to Life in the UK, where does Father Christmas come from?
 - A. Lapland
 - B. Iceland
 - C. The North Pole
5. Life in the UK explains what to do if you spill someone's pint in the pub. What, according to the book, usually happens next?
 - A. You would offer to buy the person another pint.
 - B. You would offer to dry their wet shirt with your own.
 - C. You may need to prepare for a fight in the car park.

Please find the answers at the bottom of the last page of the newsletter.

Reuniting families

Anyone who has been separated from their family by armed conflict, political upheaval, natural disaster, or migration can make use of the Red Cross International Messaging and Tracing Service (ITMS). The service uses Red Cross offices around the world to help refugees find their relatives; to pass on family news when telephone and postal services have broken down; and to provide certification of detention for prisoners of war and detainees.

The ITMS Coordinator for Sussex, Jayne Stephens, and her volunteers have worked with many asylum seekers, who are trying to trace their loved ones. They start out by interviewing the asylum seeker and gathering as much information as they can to assist them in their search. The Red Cross prioritises detention cases and, as the process can be prolonged, does its best to keep in touch with the detainee, even if they are transferred, released, or removed.

If you think that the person you are visiting would benefit from this service, contact the GDWG office, call Jayne direct on 01903 823612, or email jstephens@redcross.org.uk

News from the management committee

Much of my time over recent days has been taken up by the applications for the new post of Brook House Detainee Support Worker. At the end of 19 November, we had 62 applications from which we had to select 5 for interview. However, the quality was so high that we decided on 6. Happily on 26th November we offered the post to Louise Peim, who thankfully has accepted. I enjoy recruiting but I was very glad of the excellent support of Nic Eadie, Doreen Johnson and Felicity Dick.

Louise's start in January will be the beginning of a whole new adventure for GDWG. The opening of Brook House in February/March will be a challenge to us all. Since it has a capacity of 400+ we are now faced with difficult decisions about the sort of service we will be able to offer in the future. It is apparent that we do not have the funds or capacity to provide Brook House detainees with the same level of practical support that those in Tinsley have had.

The cost of supplying phone cards to Brook House to the same level that Tinsley has had we estimate to be £1000 a month. The toiletries available to detainees from the centre itself are now much better than previously. Sorting and delivering toiletries is very time consuming. Should we continue exactly as we have before? Getting enough good quality clothes, sorting and supplying them to a detention centre population of over 500 will be a huge task. Providing destitution/removal money would cost us around £9k a year. And of top of this are the unknown factors inherent in a new venture.

Practical support is important but what happens if emotional support is lessened by our emphasis on the former.

These are some of the concerns that the Management Committee is wrestling with. We have limited resources. We have been greatly helped by an excellent planning paper from Nic, but haven't reached any final answers. What do you as a visitor/supporter think? I would like to hear from you. Call me on 01737 216128 or email me on mjohn.barrett@ntlworld.com, or contact me via the office.

John Barrett

Answers to the British Citizenship Test questions; Sorry, we don't know them either!

Dates for your diary

25th February, 7pm –
The next volunteer training session for all vols, at venue tbc.

Next group meetings

Reigate – 10th Dec
Horsham – 4th Feb
Brighton – 29th Jan
Crawley – 12th Jan
Oxted – 20th Jan

And finally...

Congratulations to Roger Baker for receiving the Crawley Mayor's Award 2008 for Service to the Community. As well as being a GDWG volunteer since the group started, Roger is Chair of the Crawley Interfaith Network, a Trustee of the Longley Trust, a voluntary teacher in schools, an Independent Custody Visitor to Police Stations (monitoring how people are treated there) and he was part of the STAY (Short Term Accommodation for Youth) Project.