

Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group Newsletter

Summer 2009

On the increase

Immigration detention is not only becoming more common, but it is also becoming much longer, says report.

Our early experiences of Brook House have so far shown us that not only are UKBA detaining more people in total, but also that a significant proportion of those detained are spending increasingly long periods in detention. Brook House seems to be very much a Colnbrook Mark II. Colnbrook IRC, at Heathrow Airport, has been open since September 2004, and like Brook House is built on the model of a category B prison.

Colnbrook has been used to hold a large percentage of ex-foreign national prisoners, and has also seen the largest number of extreme long-term detainees. The London Detainee Support Group, who visit detainees at Colnbrook, reported in their Detained Lives report published earlier this year, that they had been in contact with almost 200 detainees over the previous 20 months who had been locked up in immigration detention for over a year, including one man who had spent a total of eight years in the UK's IRCs.

Recently, five visitors' groups from around the country have been making 'snapshot' assessments of how many people they are in contact with in detention centres, and how long they have been held for. The resulting report shows quite astonishing results, with figures from June 1st showing that there were 138 detainees who had been detained for more than one year. These figures only represent those

detainees who we have had contact with, and are from just 6 of the eleven IRCs in the UK, and include only four prisons. It is not known how many ex-prisoners are held in immigration detention in prison after completion of their sentence, but it is certainly a very significant number, reaching into the hundreds. All of this suggests that the real number of detainees held long-term is considerably higher than the one we were able to report, but unfortunately the Home Office do not currently publish full and complete figures for this.

The figures we have for Brook House so far show that there are at least 14 detainees who have been in detention for over a year, plus four more at Tinsley. The true figure for Brook House particularly is likely to be significantly higher as we are only in touch with around a quarter to a third of the population there currently. Many of those who are held long-term are from countries to which returns cannot normally be



D Wing at Brook House

made, either due to problems with the re-documentation process (eg Iran, Algeria, Eritrea), there being no viable route of return (Somalia, Iraq), or because the Home Office have accepted that they will not make enforced returns (Zimbabwe.) This paradoxical situation is resulting in months and years of essentially futile detention, with the Home Office seemingly desperate to keep these people locked up for no valid reason. Can the demands of immigration control ever justify the deprivation of liberty for such long periods? For more information, plus copies of both reports referred to above, please see www.detainedlives.org
Nic.

Volunteers page

Thank you Roger!

Roger Baker, one of our longest serving volunteers described to me the early days of the group when detainees were housed in a building nicknamed the 'bee hive' at Gatwick Airport and he vividly remembers the detainees he has visited over the years including Anthony from Nigeria (the first person he visited) and Robert from Macedonia, a political refugee who now runs his own business bringing migrant workers to the UK! Roger compares his work with GDWG to that of one of his other roles...Independent Custody Visitor at Crawley police station making unannounced visits to those in the cells ensuring that they know their rights and asking and seeing how they are treated.



Many of us in the group know Roger as a Quaker – he has been Clerk of the Area Meeting and is now Assistant Clerk and Overseer at the Ifield Meeting House...and as the Chair of The Longley Trust, of Churches Together in West Crawley, and of Crawley Interfaith Network. Less known to us is his early life as a Methodist in South West London, when he discovered a considerable musical

talent at a young age and was awarded a music scholarship to study the piano at the Royal College of Music. Music has been important to Roger throughout his life. After obtaining an economics degree, and teaching in Montreal for seven years, Roger came to Crawley to work at Thomas Bennett

Community College (latterly as an EAL teacher) for twenty nine years. His travels have taken him far afield – China, USSR, Tanzania and also Zimbabwe, where he taught for six months and has many personal links.

Roger talks with passion his feeling 'at home' with the Quakers and describes his appreciation for their accepting non-judgemental atmosphere.

I can vouch for his ability to arrange Hiroshima vigils in the rain!! As a Quaker, Roger describes the importance of 'faith in action' and we have witnessed this in his work for GDWG and the many other local charities he assists. In 2009, Roger is 'stepping down' from his work with GDWG and we will miss him very much. Thank you, Roger!

Anna.

And Congratulations Felicity!

As previously mentioned on the GDWG website, founder member and current trustee Felicity Dick has recently been awarded an MBE on the honours list. The award is in recognition of the tireless work Felicity has done over the last fourteen years with the group. She was Chair for many years, but has now relinquished that position so that she may focus more on fundraising. Over the years Felicity has raised many hundreds of thousands of pounds, without which the organisation would simply not exist. Not only that, but her knowledge of the work we do has been invaluable to all



of the staff who have worked here, and also of course to the Management Committee.

With typical humility, Felicity accepted the award by recognising the importance of

everyone involved with the group over the years, saying, "I am very proud to have received this honour. It is recognition of the importance and quality of support given to detainees by GDWG's dedicated staff and volunteers over the last 14 years. Sadly, detainees still desperately need that support."

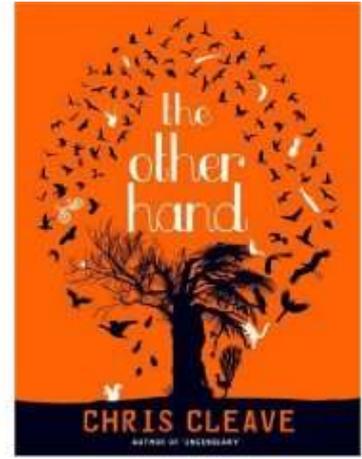
Congratulations Felicity, and thank you.

Let's hope that in another fourteen years there will be no need for groups such as ours.

GDWG News

- G4S have agreed to issue us all with new ID cards, so that we do not have to take in our passports or driving licences when we visit. They require a photo of each visitor, even those who already have a Tinsley ID card. Please could all visitors either email or post me a photo of your head and shoulders as soon as you can.
- We have just been informed that we are no longer allowed to take in any toiletries to either centre. This is apparently down to a UKBA decision, as they suspect that drugs are smuggled into IRCs in this way.
- We are hoping to start a drop-in service at Tinsley House very soon. G4S have given us the go-ahead, but they now have to wait for UKBA to give us permission. Once we (hopefully) receive this, we plan to go in to the centre once a week, and meet any detainee who wants to meet us. We plan to offer help with Section 4 applications, liaison with solicitors, signposting to other organisations, as well as any other welfare questions. It may be that we will be allowed to use volunteers to do this as well as staff, so if anyone is interested in helping with these, please let the office know.
- There is now a new Section 4 application form for detainees, which we have copies of in the office. The new system is supposed to make things quicker and easier, although there seem to have been some initial problems, resulting in some delays in addresses being allocated. If released, detainees will initially be housed for no more than two weeks at a temporary address, and then be moved to a more permanent placement after that. The new form is now only two pages long, and very simple to complete.
- Asylum support allowance to those waiting for their asylum claims to be decided are being reduced for the majority of asylum seekers. This support, called Section 95 support, will continue to consist of accommodation, typically in the North of England, but the actual allowance will be reduced from £42.16 to £35.13 for all new applicants over 25. Those under 25 always received this lower sum.
- Sheffield City Council are calling on the government to reinstate the right to work to asylum seekers. The proposal is based on the Sustainable Communities Act, a law which obliges central government to listen to public proposals submitted to local authorities.
- A number of recent High Court rulings have called into question the lawfulness of indefinitely detaining Somalis from the Central and Southern parts of the country, as there is no real viable route of return, or prospect of sending anyone back there. This has not actually set a legal precedent, but it could mean that Somalis may be able to bring about successful unlawful detention cases, and therefore be released. Should you want to know any more about this, please contact the office.

Book Review: The Other Hand, by Chris Cleave



'The Other Hand,' written by Chris Cleave is a truly frightening tale that will leave you reaching for the hankies. It highlights the devastating impact that corporate terror tactics and UK immigration policy can have on individuals. It raises many issues that as visitors to detainees you will recognise, particularly the difficult choices (or lack of them) that those who come to the UK seeking protection, face on a daily basis.

The editor Susie Doore writes, *"It's an amazing novel – horrifying but hilarious, tragic but uplifting, hugely entertaining and highly intelligent."*

The story gives an insight into how immigration detainees are treated. After reading this novel we became interested in the plight of immigration detainees. My friend told me about the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group and we both attended an information evening to find out more. Since then we have been visiting detainees.

'The Other Hand' is a wonderful book to share with friends and acquaintances and in doing so raise awareness of the detention estate in Britain. With Nicole Kidman buying the film rights for this novel, a film could take the plight of detainees to a much wider audience.

Jo Darrant & Nicky Lambie
(volunteers)

Detention across the globe – The International Detention Coalition (IDC)

The IDC was launched in 2006 in response to the increasing use of detention on an international level, as a means of controlling migration. It is an international coalition that is comprised of over 200 non-governmental organisations that work with people in detention or work more broadly on migration issues, in over 50 countries. The idea behind the coalition is that through these various groups sharing resources and information about issues on detention, there will be an increased protection of the human rights of asylum seekers,

refugees and more generally those wishing to migrate. It found that regional policies on immigration, in particular the detention estates, can have a direct impact on international policies. The IDC aims to not only monitor but to tackle the global problem through working with states rather than vilifying them for bad practice.

The ultimate objective of the IDC is to put an end to immigration detention, particularly the detention of children. However, whilst the detention estates are still operating, it aims to monitor the conditions and the rights that detainees are entitled to. The IDC is also developing alternatives to detention and lobbying for these to be piloted. Australia is a good case study of how this type of monitoring and lobbying can create change. The detention estate in Australia exists in remote places such

as Christmas Island & is known for its poor conditions and limited rights of detainees. They operate the centres in places where access is difficult. The government uses hard-line tactics to try and deter people from trying to enter the country, this increasingly seems to be the case with UK policies.



Stewart Detention Centre, Lumpkin, Georgia, USA

However, this method became counter-productive in Australia as people who had languished in these centres developed long term problems, which made removing people from the country more difficult.

In Australia in 2005, after much campaigning, the government decided to release all of the children in detention into the care of the Red Cross. Australia no longer routinely detain children, as we do here in the UK. The introduction of independent monitoring of the centres has improved conditions. The right to work has also been reinstated after ten years of lobbying from NGOs. The detention estate in Australia is far from being used as a good practice model, but it is a good example of how working together in promoting awareness of such issues can shift public opinion and in turn, government policy.

For more information about the IDC, you can visit the website <http://idc.rfbf.com.au>

Louise



African drums!

Sitting in the office, building friendships with detainees on the telephone, conversation can drift away from their present pain to focus on their hopes, plans and sometimes dreams for life on release. One detainee, T, who was suffering physically as a result of torture in his country of origin, described his love of music to me and wished he could teach drumming and feel he was contributing something positive to society rather than sitting waiting for time to pass at Tinsley House where he said he felt 'useless'. We agreed that if he was released in the UK, I would help him to make this a reality and I am delighted to share with you some photographs of T's drumming workshop in a local school which took place in earlier this year. Our thanks to GDWG volunteer and teacher Kate Singleton for her help with this project which was a memorable experience for the children (aged 8 to 11) and for T who hopes to visit the school again soon.

Anna



Funding GDWG

It costs about £140,000 a year to keep our organisation going. This is raised almost entirely from Trusts and we are extremely grateful to them for the trust they place in us. A full list can be seen in our annual accounts. Awards vary from £500 to many thousands – some are one off payments, some are over a 3 year period. In 2009 we obtained the following new grants; £40,000 from the Diana Princess of Wales Memorial Fund particularly to support our work with young people, £67,000 from Esmée Fairbairn Foundation for a salary and £15,000 from the Joseph Rank Trust each over a 3 year period. Other one off grants have come from the Norda Trust, the Eleanor Rathbone Trust, the Longley Foundation and the Tinsley Foundation. I do most of the fundraising with considerable input from Nic, but this year Nic has successfully negotiated grants with funders, and Anna Pincus and volunteer Lauren Pepperell have also made successful applications. Thanks to all of them.

Felicity Dick



Words from detention

Extract of a poem 'I Have Dreams' written by a detainee in Tinsley House.

I have dreams.
I know not if it is day or night.
God told me :
I do not divide up the land.
Whatever their race
Hatred and jealousies
Will not flourish if divisions
Between countries are no more.
With Jesus as your guide,
He will show you the way.

I have dreams.
I know not if it is day or night.
God told me:
Worship and value all that is
genuine.
and reject insincerity.
Whatever their race
If anyone needs help
Show Compassion.
Reject the political sham.
With Jesus as your guide
He will reveal the inner truth.
and see through the veil of
deceits.

I have dreams.
I know not if it is day or night.
God told me:
In the world there is no illegal
immigration.
Whatever their race
All on earth
are sister and brother.'

*And on his release, the same
detainee sent the message 'I
feeling here all well and fresh.
I have free like a bird.
Everything all feeling nice...
I am like a little bird flying to
look for that free of sky. I very
happy, that's too long lost
freedom'...*

Thank you...

To Omar Deghayes, who gave us all a very moving and thought-provoking account of his time detained at Guantanamo Bay, at the All Visitors' Meeting last month. Also big thanks to Father Paul for filling in at the last minute!

Dates for your diary...

The next area group meetings are as follows...

Brighton - 8th Sep
Crawley - 2nd Sep
Horsham - 16 Sep
Oxted - 2nd Sep
Reigate - T.B.C.

News from the Management Committee

Last month we were successful in recruiting a new Detainee Support Worker, Hannah Jackson. Hannah will be starting with us in late August. Thanks again to Nic and Doreen Johnson for the care and trouble they took in choosing Hannah from a good field. I would not have liked to do it on my own. Hannah has been keen to work for us and this is the second time she sent in an application. We had a very good response to the advertisement though we did not, on this occasion, use Guardian Newspaper and relied on our network of contacts and the "charity job" website. We were very fortunate to have so many applicants; not only so many but so many of quality.

This August marks the end of Nic's second year as Coordinator and I would like to say how much I appreciate him. He works very hard and he has become very well informed about detention. He is not afraid of change and is always seeking new ways to help detainees. He is firm but friendly in his dealings with both, G4S who run the centres, and UKBA. We knew, when the new centre Brook House opened, that it would prove a challenge but few of us realised just how different it would be to Tinsley House. Nic has been constant in trying to ensure that those held in Brook House have their legitimate complaints heard and addressed. He even anticipated the riot that took place in June earlier this summer. Enough but it needed saying!

I would also like to highlight the work of Felicity Dick who since she ceased being Chair has dedicated a huge amount of her time to fundraising. Raising enough money to keep GDWG going and effective is a big task and Felicity is always about 18 months ahead of the rest of us. It is thanks to her and her persistence that we have been able to recruit Hannah and Louise in the last year. I am sure that you all know that Felicity received an MBE "for voluntary service to asylum seekers" in June and there is no sign yet that she is resting on her laurels.

John Barrett, Chair of Trustees