

# GDWG Newsletter

## Spring 2010

*Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group*

### The Lost Boys: Detainees facing removal to places they no longer know

With Home Office immigration policy becoming increasingly stringent, more and more people who have been living in the UK for many years are now finding themselves facing deportation to countries that they no longer have any connection with. Many of these people (typically young men) have found themselves in the criminal justice system, often after difficult childhoods. Upon completion of their prison sentence, they find themselves detained and facing removal. They have spent the majority of their formative years in the UK, attending school and growing accustomed to British culture. Many tell us they did not even think of themselves as 'foreign nationals', but believed that they were British.

We have seen increasing numbers of these young men recently. In 2009, we were in contact with a twenty two year old man who had come to the UK from Angola when he was just four years old. He was taken into care at the age of eight, as his parents were abusive towards him. He remained in the care system, where he was abused by one of his foster carers, until he was eighteen years old. When he was nineteen, he found himself homeless after he was evicted from his flat, living in a homeless shelter for a while but then thrown out for drinking alcohol. One night whilst he was wandering the streets, he saw an open window and entered the property.

revoked; he now has discretionary leave as the Home Office lost their battle to deport him, but they were able to strip him of his status. When I asked him about his experience, he said (in his unmistakable London accent),

'I never expected to be taken to detention after prison, I didn't know about these places ...When I heard they wanted to send me to Angola I was terrified. I have no memories of being in Angola, I don't even speak any Portuguese. I grew up here, in England....In Tinsley House I couldn't sleep at night as I always thought they were going to come and put me on a plane...'

We were also recently in contact with a man from Nigeria, who had lived in Britain for sixteen years, since he was eight years old. After a long spell in detention and an unsuccessful legal battle, he was deported. After return, he emailed from Lagos to say:

'Have been finding it difficult to keep my feet on ground

out here. have trying to find an accomodation but its difficult.... I still couldn't get or find any help from the British government, i really feel abandoned and helpless'.

At what point do these men who have been through the British education system, who have often worked and contributed toward the economy, become British? Only when they have the money and the knowledge of how to regularise their status, and only if they have never had any kind of trouble with the law. The detention estate is filling up with men in similar situations. While they may have committed offences here, they are not treated the same as a British national who commits the same crime. Not only are they punished by serving their prison sentence, but they are then further punished by being detained, often for longer periods than they spent in prison, and then ultimately removed. A triple punishment, simply because they are not British. What remains unclear is what happens to them when they are returned to places that are just distant childhood memories.

**Louise Peim**

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He was convicted of burglary and sentenced to twenty-four months in prison, upon completion of his sentence he was transferred to Tinsley House. He finally won his appeal against deportation after four months in detention, but the Home Office decided to challenge this decision, leading to another three months in Tinsley House before he was released on bail. His indefinite leave to remain has been

## Reporting at the Home Office: A volunteer's experience



Demonstration outside Communications House, Old Street, London

I accompanied an ex-detainee to Communication House in London where he is required to report twice weekly between 12 - 4pm as part of his bail instruction.

I was totally unprepared for the lengthy queue which snaked around the large building and continued along the adjacent road. Edward joined the queue

which included several small children and babies, pregnant women and even a man on crutches. The wait to the entrance took four and three quarter hours and luckily it wasn't raining that day though it was bitterly cold. The procedure of reporting took less than ten minutes and was conducted in a disinterested manner

(possibly due to the sheer volume of people). I found the queue of dignified humanity, too fearful to protest, extremely humbling. Edward tells me this waiting time is fairly routine, and that his humiliating treatment at Communication House leaves him feeling a second class person.

***Lin Gaston-Parry,  
Horsham volunteer***

## Letter from an ex-Tinsley detainee

My name is Moses Eduvie. I was detained at Tinsley House immigration removal centre for over 14 months. When I arrived at Tinsley house I had very few clothing and toiletries and the officers told me to contact Gatwick Detainee Welfare Group. From the moment I contacted GDWG they provided me with calling card, warm clothing and allocated me with someone who visited me weekly for more than 13 months at Tinsley.

Every time I am faced with challenges I was able to discuss with GDWG. Most of the time my problem were solved however if they were unable to resolve my problem, they knew who could. GDWG did not ask me the background to my case or blamed me for anything. They helped when I had difficulty finding solicitor, opening my email box and printing documents. Anna even assisted by sending email letter to the Member of Parlia-

ment on my behalf and offered to transport my wife and children to Gatwick to see me in detention.

Detention centres are terrible places with very poor conditions but the work of GDWG in Tinsley makes a world of difference and makes life more bearable. When my immigration matter is resolved and am allowed to stay in the United Kingdom, I would like to become a volunteer for GDWG because without them I do not

know how I could have coped. May God bless all the staffs at GDWG for their hard work and special thanks to those who donate to them to make the support I received a reality.

**Moses**

*"The work of  
GDWG in  
Tinsley makes a  
world of difference  
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more bearable."*

## A day in the life of the GDWG office

Anna is first in at 8am. She picks up the messages on the two ansaphones; six from detainees on the freephone line, and another seven on the main line (four from detainees, two from volunteers, and the other from a local church who want to drop off some clothes). After checking her emails, she begins calling detainees back and is deep in conversation with a detainee who has recently self-harmed and has been in RFA (Removal From Association) for several days when Nic and Louise arrive after driving up from Brighton together. Two more computers are turned on, two more email accounts opened up. Hannah is soon in, fresh off the train from London. In a staff meeting we organise diaries, discuss referrals to the College of Law for bail applications, and go

through the database, checking our 'priority' detainees (those we feel are most vulnerable). Nic then has to rush off to London for a meeting of the Asylum Rights Campaign Detention Subgroup, where the other visitors' groups, BID, Refugee Council and others meet to discuss developments in the detention estate.

Louise goes to Brook House to visit a new age disputed detainee (she's laden with bags of clothes to deliver). Hannah prepares a talk for a local school and gives advice to an ex-detainee calling in distress. The church group arrive with eight bags of second hand clothes and luckily Dorothy from the Crawley group arrives shortly after to help out clothes sorting. Anna talks to

volunteers and to the new welfare officer at Brook House. She leaves at 3. Louise is back at the office by half four and is straight on the phone to detainees, solicitors, to BID and checking up on Section Four applications. Nic returns from London and calls AVID, a detainee recently sectioned, and Medical Justice. Cups of tea are consumed! Hannah is last to go home just after 6. She calls the detainee that Anna spoke to first thing in the morning and gives him a phonecard and the contact for The Samaritans in case he needs help in the night hours. She locks the office, sets the alarm, and completes another day in the life of the office.

Nic Eadie



Clothing stacked, sorted and ready to be distributed from the GDWG office.

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*"Anna is deep in conversation with a detainee who has recently self-harmed"*

## JRS Conference - From Destitution to Empowerment: an EU agenda for Change, February 2010

This one day conference was an insight into the destitution of migrants within Europe and opened with powerful testimony from two people who found themselves destitute in the UK. There were workshops on supporting destitute migrants and on the Citizens for Sanctuary Campaign. As we heard from the speaker at our AGM, this

campaign promotes the 'Sanctuary Pledge' and there are six steps for citizens to save sanctuary.

1. Train to become a Sanctuary Champion.
2. Build a delegation of people to meet with your parliamentary candidate.
3. Arrange for your delegation to meet your parlia-

mentary candidate.

4. Negotiate with your parliamentary Candidate.
5. Take action to publicise the Sanctuary Pledge.
6. Meet with the elected MP six months later to review progress.

To sign up for a Citizens for Sanctuary training ses-

sion and for more information, go to [citizensforsanctuary.org.uk](http://citizensforsanctuary.org.uk) or [sanctuarypledge.org.uk](http://sanctuarypledge.org.uk)

**Jo Darrant, Horsham volunteer**



## GDWG news

- On the 19<sup>th</sup> April, GDWG will be hosting a meeting with the London Detainee Support Group, as part of their Detained Lives campaign, highlighting the issue of indefinite detention in the UK. There will also be speakers from Brighton Voices in Exile and Student Action for Refugees, as well as food from some local refugee cooks (organised by BVIE). Anyone is welcome to the event, which will start at 6pm at Community Base, Queens Road, Brighton.
- An action plan was recently published by UKBA, addressing the recommendations made by HMIP when they inspected Tinsley House last year. Among these recommendations are a number relating to the facilities for single women and families. While these are implemented, UKBA have announced that single women will not normally spend more than 3 days in Tinsley House, and families no more than 24 hours, before either being removed, released or transferred to Yarl's Wood.
- There are some serious problems with the Section 4 system, which allows detainees to be allocated a NASS address for bail. For any detainee who is assessed as 'high risk' and who needs to be housed in special accommodation, the waiting times for these addresses to be allocated is increasing all the time, due to a lack of appropriate bed spaces. Many detainees have been waiting many weeks or even months to be offered an address with which to apply for bail. Bhatt Murphy solicitors are looking at taking this issue to a judicial review, in an attempt to force the Home Office into action.
- The Asylum and Immigration Tribunal (AIT), the body who deal with immigration appeals, has been replaced by a two-tier tribunal system. The practical effects of this are likely to be fairly minimal, although there are new application forms and a new address to send them to. For more information, please see the Info Service section of the ILPA website ([www.ilpa.org.uk](http://www.ilpa.org.uk))
- GDWG are working with Medical Justice to try and recruit some local doctors to volunteer their services by going into the Gatwick centres and producing medical reports for detainees who need them. Lauren from the Brighton group has met up with MJ, and we hope we will soon have a group of Brighton-based doctors who we can call upon, via MJ, when needed.
- Many thanks to everyone who came to our AGM in March, and especially to our speaker, Canon Nicolas Sagovsky, who gave a fascinating talk on his experiences working with refugees over many years.

## Human Rights Watch International Film Festival

March saw the Human Rights Watch International Film Festival and I went to see *Mrs Goundo's Daughter*.

The film is an account of a 22-year-old Malian mother's struggle for asylum in Philadelphia, in order to protect her two-year old daughter from undergoing female genital mutilation. In Mali 85% of girls are excised in this way. The film merges scenes of life in Philadelphia for Mrs Goundo and her three children showing their immigration case progressing, with clips of an excision ceremony in a Malian village in which 62 girls (ranging from 6 months to 12 years old) are prepared for the ceremony. The viewer witnesses the build up and aftermath, both of which are truly horrific as sixty-



two little girls with white shawls around their necks emerge from a lush tropical backdrop with a look of horror and shock on their faces. There is an eerie silence as only a few of the younger girls scream and cry, most of them remain silent, as they do not want to shame their family.

The Malian first lady is against FGM and there are a small number of grass roots organizations in Mali that need support from the global community. If anybody

would like any further information please see:

[www.endfgmnow.org](http://www.endfgmnow.org)

Hannah Jackson

## Campaigning on detention issues: The Detention Forum

Asylum Rights Campaign (ARC) is developing a new initiative, the Detention Forum, to create a movement which challenges and questions the legitimacy of detention. Is it acceptable for detention to be a normal part of immigration policy? Are there any alternatives?

At our first meeting in July last year, over 20 organisations, including Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group, met to take

stock of what has been happening in the world of detention. We will be further meeting in mid April to explore ways to put the issue of the legitimacy of immigration detention back on the agenda and will regularly update you of our progress, so watch this space!

Continuing and increasing the use of immigration detention without due

diligence needs to be seen as what it is: an embodiment of failures by society and by all of us to seriously engage with the issues of human rights and dignity of those who happen to cross the border into this country. For more information, please contact Eiri Ohtani, ARC Co-Chair, at [asylum-rights@googlemail.com](mailto:asylum-rights@googlemail.com)

**Eiri Ohtani**

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*“Is it acceptable for detention to be a normal part of immigration policy? Are there any alternatives?”*

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## Update on the situation in Calais

I went to Calais a few weeks ago and spent three days with the activists No Borders. The people I met were living in squats, in the middle of an empty field, in the middle of “a jungle”, in the middle of nowhere. The places used as “shelters” had no windows, no doors, nothing and it was so cold...I witnessed how these people were living and how nice and friendly they were towards the people who



like me, were providing hot drinks, biscuits and conversation to them. At times so cold, we were also taking wood for making fire for the long and cold nights. The situation in Calais is terrible and traumatic.

I saw human beings who explained amazing stories on how they crossed Europe and/or how they managed to survive wars. I also saw children. The youngest one was 12 and the oldest 16. Children that in

many cases were not unaccompanied by adults on their way to Calais, scared of being recruited by the Taliban in Afghanistan and/or they had no family left. I was sad and angry on my way back. I did not know if the people I met had any opportunity to get out of there or if I was going to see them again, and how they were going to survive.

**Assumpció, Brighton group**

## Volunteers pages

### One year in: A GDWG volunteer's experiences of visiting

I remember my first visit to Tinsley House clearly, going through security. My first detainee was friendly and open and sharing with me his deep distress at his situation. But somehow it wasn't gloomy or dismal- as well as stories of torture and escape we talked of his love for his home country and how he'd grown up. Those I have subsequently visited have also shared the story of their lives, their homelands and what has happened to them in the UK. They have listened to me when there was something I wanted to share, as any friend would. They have all seemed to appreciate having someone from outside the system to talk to.

I have listened to men who have been tortured,

but who have been let down by our legal system and returned to their torturers. I have listened to men who struggle to find out information about their own health. But even in this there is hope. One man had the luck to live in Kate Hooey MP's constituency- not only did she listen to his wife and deal with his case, but she telephoned him personally in Tinsley. You cannot measure what that means to someone who feels completely forgotten and lost in the system.

As a visitor I belong to a local group. Here I can share my worries and talk about our experiences without breaking confidentiality. I realise that I have to do what I can, but it will be differ-

ent from what someone else is able to do. The important thing is to be there to listen and give of yourself to your friend, not letting them down when everyone else seems to have forgotten them. And because I visit and have friends in the immigration system, when I talk over the water cooler to my friends at work I can tell them real stories. These confound the nonsense that some papers print. I have never come across someone who wished ill to an individual when they know that I am talking of a real person's real story. That is how we can slowly change the world we live in.

*Gemma Stockford*



Gemma has been volunteering with GDWG since November 2008



I read your article about Prince Bakare ("I'd rather be sent back to my torturers than stay in a detention centre", 4 February) having just visited my friend in Brook House immigration removal centre. Failing any last-minute reprieve he will be in a van as you read this, on his way to Heathrow to be deported to face the torturers in Africa from whom he fled.

You quote from the head of immigration: "We consider every individual case with enormous care and where someone needs our protection, we will grant it and do so ." That statement rings hollow for many I have met. Our legal system seems set up to prevent them having their stories heard. Their lawyers, when they can find one, are overworked and often apparently uninterested.

If they come into contact with the courts for having the wrong papers (whoever was able to get the right papers from a government while fleeing for their lives?) they may receive a "criminal" record and lose even the limited protection against deportation that we may offer.

I have met a few people in similar circumstances. I listen to their stories of their country

(where they would love to be if they could be safe) and how they came here. They believe that when they get here Britain will be fair and just and will listen to their case. To see their hopes dashed after they have clung to them despite the mounting evidence that few people care and those that do cannot change the system makes me feel sick to the core.

Dr Gemma Stockford

### Gemma's letter to The Independent: How refugees lose faith in Britain

## Meet Yvonne Campbell by Anna Pincus

Yvonne has been a GDWG visitor for six months. She mentions friends of hers who give financially to their favoured charities but who have watched her involvement with disapproval; 'you take these things too far!' Yvonne quickly became known as 'Auntie' to the second detainee, David, who she visited. Work colleagues soon noted Yvonne's new knowledge about Chelsea football club as David's influence permeated her life and Yvonne operated a 'cuttings service' sending him newspaper reports on Chelsea matches. Colleagues who were approximately the same size as David were invited to part with items from their wardrobe 'you

must be expecting something new for Christmas!...'Tinsley Officers witnessed Yvonne and David singing hymns in the visits room and once greeted her at the gate with the words 'oh thank goodness you have come, we're so pleased to see you, he's so low!'

Yvonne supported David through a rollercoaster of emotions. When Medical Justice were slow to produce a medical report, Yvonne offered to type it for them! She discovered that detainees can reclaim tax if they are detained part way through the tax year (form P50) and hunted through websites to help David find specific

country information. Yvonne gave David mini English language lessons (one favourite sentence of his was 'He left his dessert in the desert because he wanted to desert his post!'). The day he left Tinsley House she drove him away with the car windows open so he could enjoy the fresh air.

Yvonne remembers conversations in difficult times; keeping hope alive but always being realistic. Visiting, she says, has been better than she ever expected but also sometimes much worse and she has endured sleepless nights worrying about David's case. David is happily



out of detention and tagged, awaiting an asylum hearing. He has attended church with Yvonne and met her friends. For Yvonne, GDWG satisfies her desire to be more than a passive supporter of causes and we'd like to thank you, Yvonne, for your energy and commitment through six intense months of visiting.

## GDWG volunteer runs marathon in the Sahara

GDWG volunteer and student of Migration Studies at Sussex University, Nina Murray, was part of an intrepid group of 33 Brits who took part in the 10th International Sahara Marathon at the Saharawi refugee camps near Tindouf (a barren corner of the Sahara Desert in South-western Algeria) last month. Nina and the rest of the UK group were running in aid of Sandblast (<http://sandblast-arts.blogspot.com/>), a London-based charity, which seeks to both raise awareness of the little-known

plight of the Saharawi refugees and fund arts-based projects at the camps, home to some 200,000 people, working to preserve their unique cultural heritage in exile. The Saharawi refugees fled their homeland of Western Sahara in 1976, when after the Spanish colonisers handed over control of the territory to a joint Moroccan-Mauritanian ad-



ministration, the Moroccans proceeded to occupy the territory. A bloody conflict followed until a UN-brokered peace plan in 1991. Since then, attempts to organize a referendum on self-determination have been consistently obstructed by the Moroccan government and the result is a protracted refugee situation and systematic human rights abuses of

Saharawi activists inside the occupied Western Sahara. Nina and the group spent a week at the refugee camps living with Saharawi families and hearing their inspirational tales of resilience, meeting local Saharawi government ministers, human rights activists and visiting schools, hospitals and local initiatives at the camps. To find out more about the UK campaign to free Western Sahara, check out <http://www.wsahara.org.uk/> and it is not too late to donate to Nina's cause at [www.justgiving.com/ninakmurray](http://www.justgiving.com/ninakmurray)

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Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group is a registered charity, set up in 1995 to offer friendship and support to asylum seekers and other immigration detainees held in detention at Gatwick Airport.

## Dates for your diary

### Next area group meetings:

- Brighton: April 12th and 13th
- Crawley: April 19th
- Horsham: April 21st
- Oxted: May 6th
- Reigate: April 19th

April 19th: Detained Lives roadshow,  
Community Base, Brighton

## **A Visitor's Dilemma by Mary Barrett**

As a visitor to the Beehive, Tinsley House and Brook House for the past fifteen years I am well aware of the effects of even a short time in immigration detention on the mental health of detainees. Sleep interruption, panic attacks, severe anxiety, headaches are among the symptoms of the enormous stress that is common and understandable given the uncertainty and despair experienced by detainees. As visitors, we do what we can to alleviate their distress and by using all the resources available to us, we know we can bring some relief to their suffering and in many cases this is a lifeline.

However, in the past eighteen months, I have visited two detainees over prolonged periods, who were suffering from severe mental illness. 'A' had suffered and witnessed terrible abuse as a child soldier, which may have caused his psychosis. At our first meeting I could see he was seriously unwell, he was distracted and unable to concentrate, staring into the middle distance for most of the visit. 'A' found sleep almost impossible and paced the corridors of Tinsley night after night. There was a pressing need for his

release, bail was sought and after some months he was successful and was released, but this release happened very quickly and was not properly planned.

Would anyone with an ounce of common sense place a seriously mentally disturbed man into NASS accommodation, over 200 miles from anyone he knows and then tag him? Not surprisingly 'A's health deteriorated and he was back in detention a few months later. He requested a transfer from Harmondsworth and I started visiting him again in Tinsley House some months later; he was sadly pleased to be back among friends. It was clear to Nic, Anna and myself that we had to work for his release into secure and supportive accommodation where he would be able to access the medical attention he so desperately needed. With great good fortune 'A' had friends who were prepared to take him in and he was released nearly a year ago and is doing well.

The second detainee, 'O', was if anything in an even worse situation, he was in Brook House having been detained for nearly

two years following a prison sentence. He was taking a number of powerful drugs for schizophrenia and epilepsy and his prolonged detention was clearly unlawful and inexplicable to me. He had been refused bail several times, even though he had a wife and children and a sibling living in the UK. Fortunately, he did have the support of very good legal advice and in late December he was released following a hearing in the High Court. In this case he had family to go to, but without that option I do not know what would have happened to him.

The condition of these two detainees certainly should have merited their swift release under Detention Centre Rule 35, as there was no doubt their health was likely to be injuriously affected by continued detention or any conditions of detention, but in neither case was their release seen as a priority by UKBA. The dilemma, for those of us who were in any way aware of their situation, was that unless their release was appropriately planned and resourced they might be better off in detention because at least in detention their mental state and drug regime should be monitored prop-

erly and they would receive shelter and food. But ... detention is bad for mental health!

My experience with 'A' and 'O' has convinced me firstly that, it is vital to ensure they have the best legal advice possible as good immigration solicitors should be prepared to take on such cases; secondly, to ensure that sufficient preparation is made for their release. These detainees with their particular needs call out to us in GDWG to make certain they receive proper support to allow them some chance of living safely in the community and outside detention centres.



*As well as volunteering with GDWG, Mary is also Chair of Brighton Voices in Exile*