



GATWICK DETAINEES WELFARE GROUP

Registered Charity No. 1124328

A Company Limited by Guarantee registered in England and Wales No. 4911257

Policy title	Volunteer guidelines on staying in touch with former detainees
Approved by	James Macpherson
Date	10 September 2018
Date ratified by Board	2018
Date revision next due	September 2020

Rationale or background to policy

To assist volunteers in choosing whether to stay in touch with a detainee who has left either Brook or Tinsley House.

To maintain appropriate boundaries and safeguards.

Policy Statement

GDWG's policy is that volunteers adhere to the following guidelines to enable themselves to make safe and appropriate decisions on staying in touch with former detainees.

Guidelines

Whether and how far to continue contact

GDWG is funded primarily to support visits to Tinsley and Brook House. GDWG Volunteers are not expected to continue their contact with former detainees after they have been released from detention. Any continued contact once the detainee has left is no longer under the auspices of the organisation. It is a private arrangement, only occurring where both visitor and former detainee think it would be beneficial. Although our practical and financial responsibility is to those currently detained at Gatwick, we want to support our volunteers should they choose to continue contact, to ensure that they are safe and comfortable. Office staff, local group coordinators or experienced visitors encourage you to discuss relevant issues which may arise. You may, for example, find it helpful to know: whether other visitors give their phone-numbers; whether they return calls or accept reverse charge calls.

Not all detainees want continuing contact, especially if they are released to supportive families, but many are keen to stay in touch. If this is the case, you must choose for each individual whether you

would like this. Do not feel under pressure. Our role is to help during detention at Gatwick, and not beyond. Our office will not pass on your contact details and will at no point imply you will maintain contact after a detainee leaves.

Should you feel under pressure to do this, you may wish to explain that this is our work and your time is now needed to visit others held at Brook or Tinsley House. The majority of those we visit accept this, and are fully aware of our limitations, due to the numbers who require our support. Most large towns have befriending and integration projects for asylum seekers, and faith communities may also be supportive of those who have recently arrived. At the office we have information about regional groups and are usually able to signpost other sources of help. Some of these are available on the GDWG website.

If a detainee is transferred to another centre, you can contact the local visitors' group, for them to call or visit (phone-numbers are in the GDWG Volunteer handbook). You may also decide to make a one-off trip to the new centre, especially if you have been visiting a detainee for many weeks, or he is particularly vulnerable. It is better in the long term for the local visiting group to take over support. They have knowledge of regional networks and can help if the detainee has a complaint about treatment in the centre. Although we may be able to fund a one-off visit, we do not generally pay expenses for trips to other centres.

Whilst there are many successful relationships after detention, we would like you to be aware in advance of some of the issues visitors have faced and to feel welcome to discuss problems with us at any time. These may include:

1. Suggestions of meeting after release.
2. Requests for financial help.
3. Requests for help in liaising with solicitors, Home Office or other organisations.
4. Continued emotional support.

GDWG Advice

1. We strongly advise visitors not to give their home address, and the code of conduct you have signed states that you do so at your own risk. Use the office address, where phone and written messages will be passed on to you promptly.

Consider the implications of inviting a former detainee to your home. Though we as visitors are careful not to be judgemental, bear in mind we often visit people with criminal records. We may not know the nature of their offence or the length of their sentence. Once you have given your address, you may no longer have the option of ending the relationship, should you wish to at a later stage. If you share a house, others are affected by your choice. It may be that, at some point, you, your partner or children feel vulnerable, if a former detainee has free access to your home. Someone who visits frequently or stays overnight may become burdensome to you or to others in your household.

2. If you plan to meet a former detainee, in keeping with general Lone-worker advice:

meet in a public place.

Tell someone else of your intention and your whereabouts.

We know of group members who have visited former detainees at home and felt extremely uneasy. Your detainee is, of course, likely to share accommodation with others, whom you have no reason to trust. The majority of our visiting partnerships involve a woman visiting a man. Your safety is of paramount importance, so you must take reasonable precautions accordingly.

3. Whilst many former detainees are at pains, however great their need, not to accept money or gifts, others may have no such qualms or may simply be desperate. Visitors have on occasion been subject to requests for increasing sums of money from ex-detainees, including those living abroad. This is sometimes possibly the result of family pressure.

How much we give is clearly a personal decision. Remember though that you have already given your time by visiting; it unfair then that you should feel additional pressure to give more.

Similarly, for help contacting lawyers and other organisations, requests can become onerous, and you may wish to pass the responsibility to someone whose official role is to help those released into the community.

Many detainees, on or after release, become some of the most vulnerable in UK society. A substantial number will have no recourse to public funds; no entitlement to work and may at some point become homeless. They may have problems with English or with literacy. They may be troubled by traumatic events from their past. They may well be socially isolated; be difficult to help, and difficult to refuse. For all these reasons, whilst we urge you to consider the potential problems, we know visitors will sometimes find continuity highly rewarding. We ask you to err on the side of caution, and, should you feel uncomfortable, that you admit this and adapt accordingly. We would encourage you to make use of the GDWG support system: the office and your local group.