

Scottish Detainee Visitors

Annual Report

2007

Chair's Report

Throughout 2007, Scottish Detainee Visitors was a vital source of support for people detained in Dungavel Immigration Removal Centre. Detainees can be held in Dungavel for an indefinite length of time, leaving them isolated, disorientated, far from family and friends and with restricted access to legal representation.

During the year, SDV visited many detainees who have been moved to immigration detention to await deportation having served sentences for criminal convictions. SDV supports detainees whatever their circumstances, and does not discriminate against those with convictions. Often, the convictions are for possessing false documentation - frequently the only option for those fleeing persecution. Release is denied to detainees who often wish to but cannot return home while their home countries refuse to issue, or the Home Office cannot locate, their travel documents.

In January, four Algerian men in similar circumstances to many of the detainees we visit, each detained for months while they awaited deportation, were released following a landmark ruling which found that their detention was unlawful.

In bringing the case, the legal project representing them argued:

"Through a combination of the administrative failings of the Home Office and the evasions of the Algerian authorities

*they have been left in limbo, denied their freedom and cooped up in immigration detention centres that, whatever you think of them, simply were not designed for long term detention."*¹

Our visitors regularly witness the despair caused by indefinite detention among all groups of detainees. We hope that the government will take notice of the report published by the Independent Asylum Commission in March 2008 that notes that the government has still not implemented the UN recommendation that the UK must specify a maximum duration for the detention of asylum seekers.²

During 2007, SDV welcomed a number of new visiting members, some from multilingual and refugee backgrounds, and our coordinator, Kate Alexander, continues her excellent work. To Kate and all the SDV members, for their commitment to supporting detainees by visiting, fundraising and continuing to raise awareness of the plight of people in Dungavel, thank you.

Mary Kate Dickie
Chair, SDV

¹ The Habeas Corpus Project, based at the charity Bail for Immigration Detainees, BID press release, January 2008

² Independent Asylum Commission Report, 27 March 2008, p.55

Coordinator's Report

2007 has been another busy year for SDV. As ever, the political environment is hostile to asylum seekers, refugees and other people who come up against the immigration rules. Scottish Detainee Visitors, however, is never short of volunteers who take a different view and we have continued to support detainees in Dungavel, visiting twice weekly and offering practical and emotional support both during and outside these visits.

In 2007 we elected a new chair and committee, welcomed and trained 11 new visitors and again increased the language skills of the organisation.

Our fundraising efforts this year included two very successful ceilidhs and a Christmas party and raffle. All were well attended and successful in raising both awareness and funds.

We continued to work with other organisations providing support to detainees and asylum seekers. This has included receiving referrals from a range of organisations such as Positive Action in Housing, Glasgow Campaign to Welcome Refugees, the Unity Centre and other visitor groups. We have also developed links with the Medical Justice Network and we hope this will assist us in supporting detainees with health problems, both physical and mental.

Our major challenge this year has been supporting people whose detention is very prolonged. Indefinite detention creates enormous pressure on detainees and, as an organisation, SDV is working to provide support to our visitors in dealing with these issues.

The work we do brings us into contact with some remarkable people. Very sadly, we learned this year that Solyman Rashed, a detainee we visited over a period of many months in 2006 and 2007 was killed in a car bomb attack on his return to Iraq. SDV members organised a vigil in George Square in September to remember Solyman, and former SDV visitor Thom Walker wrote a moving tribute to him, which is available to read on our website. I'd like to take this opportunity to remember all the people we visited in 2007, in particular Solyman, and to thank our committed team - visitors, members and committee - for all their hard work.

Kate Alexander
Coordinator, SDV

What did SDV do in 2007?

Visiting Detainees

SDV’s main aim is to alleviate feelings of isolation and disempowerment for people detained in Dungavel by visiting and offering support. Because of the isolated location of Dungavel, SDV relies on members’ own cars to travel to Dungavel in groups of up to five, twice a week.

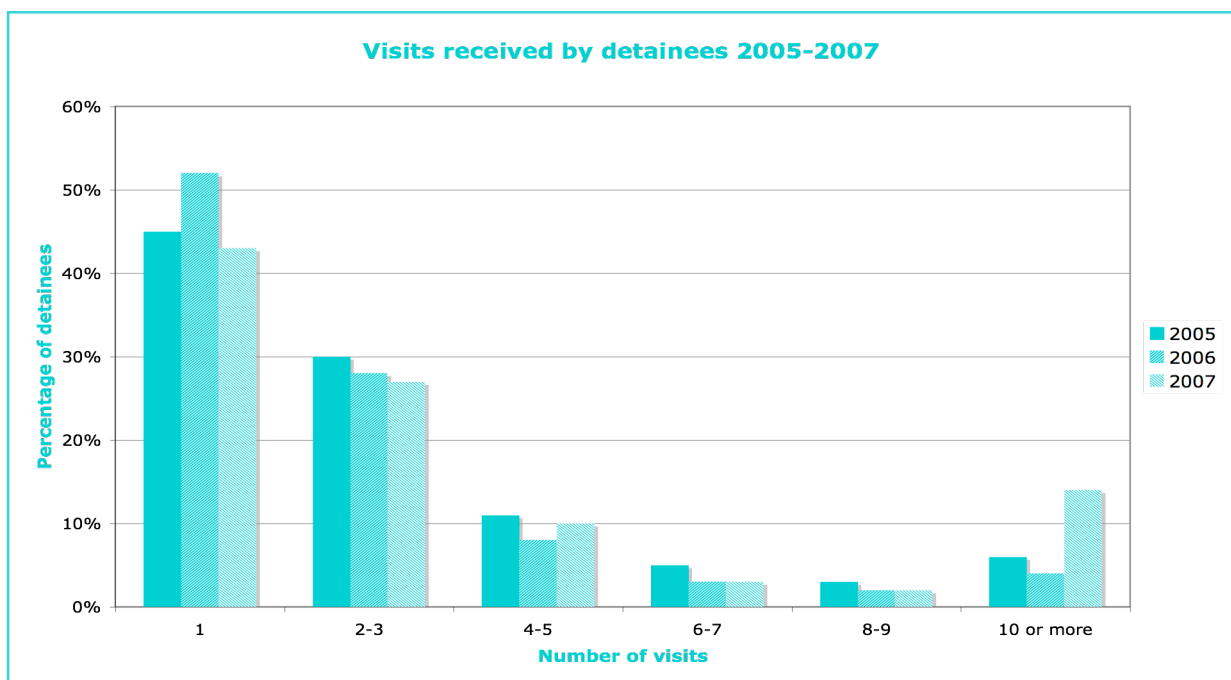
In 2007, SDV made 98 visits to the Centre, visiting a total of 159 detainees, compared to 212 in 2006. The lower number of detainees is because we saw fewer families with children this year than last. We also saw individual detainees more frequently.

The average number of detainees seen on each visit was six but the number varied from two to 15.

As in previous years, the majority of the people we visited were single men (73 per cent). We also visited 36 women (23 per cent), most of them detained as single people, and seven children (four per cent).

In 2007, SDV visitors supported detainees from 35 different countries. The country producing the highest number of detainees was Algeria (21 detainees compared to just eight in 2006). Nigeria produced the next largest number of detainees (14). Pakistan, Afghanistan and Somalia also produced 10 or more detainees during the year.

The proportion of detainees we saw for just one visit fell sharply from 52 per cent in 2006 to 43 per cent in 2007. Fourteen per cent of the detainees we saw were visited



10 or more times, compared to just four per cent in 2006 and six per cent in 2005

These figures reflect the fact that detainees are increasingly being held in Dungavel for periods lasting many months. One detainee received more than 30 visits during the year

One factor contributing to a longer period in detention is the number of detainees who have been detained after receiving a criminal conviction. In 2007, 25% of detainees we saw disclosed that they have a criminal conviction, usually for offences such as travelling on false documentation. Over the last year, such people have increasingly been moved to immigration detention after they have served their prison sentence.

"It's almost 5 years since I started visiting. A friend had a tough job talking me into it but I gave in because SDV were short of drivers and Dungavel is not easy to get to. A hundred visits later, I realise it has been one of the best decisions I ever made - the gratitude expressed by everyone we meet shows how important it is for detainees to know someone cares for them. As long as this detention centre exists we will continue to provide this invaluable service."

Indefinite and lengthening detention presents particular challenges for detainees and visitors. Many of the detainees we visit suffer increasing frustration, depression and isolation as a result. Our visitors work hard to provide support in these circumstances by contacting detainees by phone in between

visits, helping them to keep in contact with family, friends and legal representatives, and attending bail hearings

Longer detention means that some of our visitors build strong relationships with detainees, some of which continue after a detainee has left Dungavel. In 2007, SDV members were able to keep in contact with several detainees who were fortunate enough to obtain bail, and with others who were moved to other removal centres.

Providing support

The practical support SDV visitors provide reflects the needs of detainees. While being detained, people in Dungavel suffer from isolation from their families and other support networks, and from legal advisers. During 2007, as a result of feedback from detainees, we increased our budget for phone cards and began to provide mobile phone top ups. In 2007 visitors:

- Provided 325 phone cards to detainees and 15 mobile top ups
- Contacted legal advisers and other organisations on behalf of detainees on 122 occasions.
- Provided toiletries and clothes to detainees on 67 occasions
- Provided emergency money totalling £320 to 16 detainees who were being removed.
- Provided written information and paperwork to 42 detainees

Welcoming New Members, Developing Skills and Knowledge

In order to maintain a diverse base of visitors, SDV regularly recruits new members. In 2007 we again expanded the language skills available to the organisation.

All new SDV visiting members attend an initial induction training session covering issues surrounding visiting Dungavel and are supported by more experienced visitors. Visitors also attend regular support meetings.

"I went to Dungavel for the first time last week, the whole group was really supportive and gave me the confidence I needed to talk to detainees."

As well as providing an opportunity for visitors to discuss visiting issues, these meetings also provide training opportunities with guest speakers invited to talk to visitors about subjects such as the role of Medical Justice, the New Asylum Model, and

applying for Section 4 support to provide a bail address.

Raising awareness

In 2007, SDV relaunched our website. The website is updated weekly with our bulletin of press cuttings and other information about immigration, asylum and detention, which is of interest both to our own volunteers and to visitors to the website. Our booklet of Information for Detainees, which we updated in 2007, is available on the website and our visitors can download it before visits so it can be distributed to detainees in Dungavel.

The website is also being used as a recruitment tool. Potential volunteers can visit the site to find out more about what being an SDV visitor entails. They can also download an application form from the site.

What does SDV plan to do in 2008?

In 2008 SDV plans to:

- Continue to provide twice-weekly visits to Dungavel – the core of our work
- Continue to recruit new visitors, especially those with language skills and particular knowledge appropriate to the experience of detainees
- Provide skills and knowledge training to our members
- Develop a network of non-visiting members, who may offer other forms of support
- Raise awareness of SDV through our website and regular events.

Financial Accounts 1 January–31 December 2007

INCOME	2007	2006	EXPENDITURE	2007	2006
	£	£		£	£
Restricted			SDV Expenditure		
Lloyds TSB	6,000	6,000	Staff Costs	9,086	6,320
Allen lane	5,000	5,000	Detainee items, phone cards & emergency payments	2,134	1,569
Total restricted	11,000	11,000	Visit travel expenses	1,449	1,595
Unrestricted			Training/meeting costs	642	747
Donations	3,777	843	Memberships / subscriptions	175	403
Fundraising	1,174	2,537	Insurance	356	573
Gift Aid	1,073	947	Fundraising Costs	164	816
Bank Interest	283	106	Other	-	135
Total unrestricted	6,307	4,433			
Total Income	17,307	15,327	Total Expenditure	14,153	12,628
			Operating	3,154	2,699
			Surplus/Deficit		

Treasurer’s Report

In 2007 we maintained the previous year’s income from grant funding but increased our unrestricted income from £4,400 to £6,300. Sixty-four per cent of our income was from grants and 36 per cent from our own fundraising activities, bank interest and gift aid, and we achieved our aim of raising at least £500 per month through fundraising. We have retained a three-month reserve of funds to cover running costs.

Thanks go to the Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland and the Allen Lane Foundation for their support. Both of these three-year awards end in 2008 and a key aim of the coming year is to secure alternative funding to ensure the future of the organisation.

The Scottish Refugee Council continues to provide SDV with office space and supplies and we thank them for their ongoing support.

SDV members and friends were again proactive in raising funds through participation in a number of events throughout the year, and we thank everyone who took part. We also thank St Helen’s parish Langside for allowing us to use St Helen’s Hall for several of our fundraising events.

Special thanks go to those who have provided support through regular monthly donations.

We will continue to develop a regular fundraising programme, which is essential if we are to increase the level and types of support we give detainees in 2008 and beyond

Michelle Opit
Treasurer, SDV

Thanks

SDV Coordinator

Kate Alexander

SDV Committee

Martin Deane

Mary Kate Dickie
(Chair)

Catrin Evans

Moya Flynn

Catriona Gibson

Nicola Howard (Vice
Chair)

Sophie Kavoukis
(Secretary)

Michelle Opit
(Treasurer)

Other SDV Members

Rima Al-Khalidi

Cathy Armstrong

Harry Balch

David Bond

Ross Burnside

Dan Brennan

Victoria Broadley

Michael Cameron

Iain Cassidy

John Collins

Kate Denyer

Nikki Diab

Corrina Elder

Marion Fairweather

Caroline Foster

Beth Fouracre

Carly Fraser

Joanne Grant

Claire Green

Elaine Hill

Paul Kelly

Zea Kennedy

Karen Leaney

Cynthia Liang

Christina Lindsay

Mary Luck

Alistair Malloy

Clare Malloy

Siobhan McFadden

Dermot McGonigle

Andrew McInally

Belle McMahon

Linda McMahon

Maura Isabella McNulty

Elias Mensah

Noel Milligan

Garry Morrison

Charity Mutebwa

Judith Nelson

Jillian Page

David Polfreman

Gillie Severin

Jonathan Sharp

Nicola Simpson

Rachel Simpson

Alan Slater

Jessie Sohal-Burnside

Alison Swinfen

Louise Whyte

Andrew Wilson

Fibie Whitchelo

Johanna Young

SDV Funders

Allen Lane Foundation

Lloyds TSB Foundation
for Scotland

Scottish Refugee
Council

And

The many people who
donated, sponsored,
bought tickets to
events and set up
monthly standing
orders in 2008.