

Scottish Detainee Visitors

Annual Report

2008

Chair's Report

In 2008, Scottish Detainee Visitors provided much needed support to those being held in Dungavel Immigration Removal Centre (IRC). Despite extreme weather and an outbreak of the mumps among detainees, we visited 139 people who are geographically and politically isolated from society.

In the wider world of UK Immigration there have been some positive developments: public awareness and debate around the detention of children is increasing; many asylum seekers have gained status through the legacy review, and a number of community-led actions have prevented hundreds of people being deported.

However, 2008 was also the year that the new Immigration Minister Phil Woolas vowed to tighten immigration legislation in order 'to provide confidence to the indigenous population that migration is under control' and announced plans to build new centres in Gatwick, Oxfordshire, and an additional space next to the existing centre at Yarl's Wood.

If increasing the number of people experiencing indefinite incarceration (to over 2000 individuals at any one time) across England and Scotland in IRCs provides proof of a system 'under control' then maybe 2008 was a success for the government. However, the publication of a number of reports from the Chief Inspector of Prisons expressing serious concerns about the

conditions in these centres; the stories of mothers in Yarl's Wood going on hunger strike in protest at the imprisonment of their children; and the increasing evidence linking indefinite detention with mental ill-health and self-harm all tell me that the system is not under control.

It is for these reasons that the work of SDV remains vital. We are able to offer support within a system that can be so alienating; we are a source of information, a reason to come out of your room, a necessary and friendly link to an often seemingly aggressive outside world.

Too often we hear of people being removed, or becoming almost permanent residents of Dungavel (one detainee has been there for over two years). But sometimes we hear the word 'bail'; sometimes we hear the word 'status'. We must keep up the hard work and the commitment to visiting regularly because for many people in Dungavel we are their only trusted contact.

I cannot thank the visitors and the management committee enough for all they do, and of course the endless and brilliant work of our coordinator Kate Alexander. It has been an honour to be Chair of SDV in 2008, so thank you.

Catrin Evans
Chair, SDV

Coordinator's Report

As usual, 2008 was a busy year for SDV. We have continued to visit Dungavel twice a week to offer support to some of the most marginalised people in the country.

This will be my last report as I will step down as coordinator of SDV shortly after our AGM this year. Since I took up the role in 2005, there have been a number of changes in the organisation. The job of coordinator has expanded from one and a half to two days a week; our committee has grown both in size and in skills, and we have continued to recruit new visitors with a range of skills and abilities.

The profile of detainees we have seen over the years has also changed. In 2005, nearly half of the detainees we visited were seen for one visit only. Detainees remained in Dungavel for short periods of time and were frequently moved round the detention estate. This trend continued and deepened into 2006, with 52 per cent of detainees visited just once before they were moved to another centre, removed from the country, or (much less frequently) released from detention.

2007 and 2008, by contrast, have been characterised by long-term detention. In 2007, 14 per cent of our detainees were visited 10 times or more, compared to just 4 per cent in 2006. And in 2008, the percentage of detainees seen only once fell to 38 per cent (see pages 4-5).

These changes require our visitors to develop and adapt their skills to new circumstances, a challenge to which they have continued to rise.

In 2008, as a result of visitors' feedback, we provided specific training in dealing with mental health issues as they worked hard to support detainees whose mental health was suffering as a result of indefinite detention.

A training needs analysis in 2009 will identify further training needs and our highly committed team of visitors will continue to develop their skills to meet the challenges presented.

I'd like to take this opportunity to wish the new committee and coordinator all the best for the future and to thank the existing team – visitors, members and committee – for all their hard work. I'd also like to remember all the detainees we have visited over the last four years: those who have been granted leave to remain, those who remain in detention, and especially those who were removed from the country, to face an uncertain and dangerous future.

Kate Alexander
Coordinator, SDV

What did SDV do in 2008?

Visiting Detainees

SDV’s main aim is to alleviate feelings of isolation and disempowerment experienced by 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.

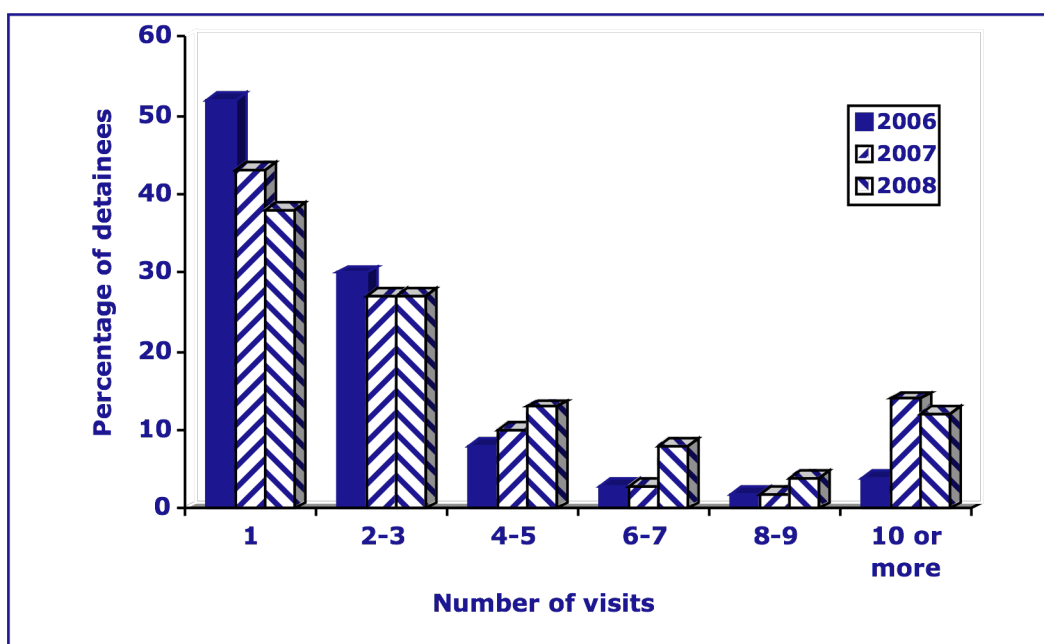
In 2008, SDV made 88 visits to the Centre. The number of detainees seen on each visit varied from three to 11, with an average of six. In total, we visited 139 detainees during the course of the year.

As in previous years, the majority of the people we visited were single men (77 per cent). We also visited 25 women (18 per cent), most of them detained as single

people, five children (four per cent) and one age-disputed minor (one per cent). As was the case in 2007, we saw very few families in 2008. In fact, we saw no-one detained as part of a family in the last six months of the year. This is not because families are not detained in Dungavel. On the contrary, families continue to be taken into detention. However, if they are brought to Dungavel, they are very swiftly moved to Yarl’s Wood in Bedfordshire, usually before we have a chance to visit.

In 2008, SDV visitors supported detainees from 33 different countries. The largest number came from Nigeria (19 detainees), followed by Afghanistan and Iraq (12 detainees each), with ten detainees coming from Iran.

Number of visits 2006 - 2008



The proportion of detainees we saw for just one visit fell again this year, from 43 per cent in 2007 to 38 per cent in 2008. These figures reflect the fact that detainees are increasingly held in Dungavel for many months. One detainee received more than 50 visits during the year.

Visiting detainees at Dungavel – some of whom have been incarcerated there for two years - is a stark reminder of the failings of our immigration system. In that sense it can be a depressing experience. But I am also constantly reminded of the strength of spirit and positivity shown by those forced to suffer detention in the most demoralising of circumstances. It always strikes me that, as a society we are shooting ourselves in the foot by not allowing these people to contribute.

As was the case last year, a factor contributing to longer detention is the number of detainees who have been detained after serving a prison sentence. In 2008, 37 per cent of detainees we saw disclosed a criminal conviction. We only record this information if a detainee volunteers it, but we know from the latest Inspection Report of Dungavel that the true proportion is much higher.

Ever lengthening periods of indefinite detention present particular challenges for detainees and for visitors, though it is not a situation unique to Dungavel. Recent research from London Detainee Support Group, which visits detainees in Colnbrook

and Harmondsworth, has highlighted the issue and has received welcome coverage in the national media. Their campaign to end indefinite detention was launched at the beginning of 2009 and information about it is available through the SDV website.

Providing Support to Detainees

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. In 2008 visitors:

- Provided 403 phone cards to detainees (an increase of 25 per cent from 2007) and 26 mobile top-ups;
- Provided toiletries, clothes and hold-alls to detainees on 82 occasions;
- Provided emergency money totalling £300 to 15 detainees who were being removed from the UK;
- Provided written information and paperwork to 42 detainees;
- Liaised with lawyers and other organisations on behalf of detainees once a week.

Supporting Visitors, Developing Skills and Knowledge

We put a great deal of effort into supporting our visitors in their role. In 2008, following feedback from visitors concerned about the impact of long-term detention on detainees, we arranged a special training session for visitors focusing on mental health. The session, funded by a grant from the

Voluntary Action Fund, was a specially tailored day-long version of the 'Mental Health First Aid' course. It was well received by visitors and has made them feel more confident in dealing with people whose detention has affected their mental health.

'I enjoy meeting people, and over the three years I have been visiting with SDV I have had the opportunity to speak with some incredible people from all over the world. Whilst I feel continuing frustration at the failings of the immigration system, and it can be hard to hear what people have gone through in their lives, I keep visiting for the inspiring and humbling experience it provides. Sometimes I think I get more from it, in terms of learning and getting perspective on life, than I can offer to the detainees themselves'.

In 2008, we also reviewed our visitor recruitment policies to improve the support we offer to new visitors when they join the organisation.

What does SDV plan to do in 2009?

In 2009, 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;
- Conduct a training needs analysis of our members to ensure our training fully reflects their needs;
- Raise awareness of SDV through our website and regular events.

Raising awareness

We raised awareness of our activities by participation in a number of Refugee Week events and through our fundraisers. The coordinator was also a speaker at events by organisations with an interest in our work.

We continue to develop our website. In 2008, we added a private members' page where visitors can download SDV policies and procedures, notes of meetings and the most recent visit rota.

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 members and to visitors to the website.

The website continues to be 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.

Financial Accounts 1 January–31 December 2008

INCOME	2008	2007	EXPENDITURE	2008	2007
	£	£		£	£
Restricted			SDV Expenditure		
Lloyds TSB	6,000	6,000	Staff Costs	9,422	9,086
Allen lane	5,000	5,000	Detainee items, phone cards & emergency payments	3,470	2,134
Voluntary Action Fund	560				
Total restricted	11,560	11,000	Visit travel expenses	1,371	1,449
			Training/meeting costs	1,133	642
Unrestricted			Memberships / subscriptions	281	175
Donations & fundraising & gift aid	5,301	6,024	Insurance	223	356
Bank Interest	260	283	Fundraising Costs	288	164
Total unrestricted	5,561	6,307			
Total Income	17,121	17,307	Total Expenditure	16,188	14,153
			Operating Surplus	933	3,154

Treasurer’s Report

In 2008, we continued to be supported by Lloyds TSB and The Allen Lane Foundation whose funding allowed us to employ our coordinator. In addition, a grant from the Voluntary Action Fund enabled us to further develop our volunteer training programme. A small reduction in funds raised informally has meant our overall income was slightly less than last year’s. Sixty-seven per cent of our income came from grants and 33 per cent from our own fundraising activities, bank interest and gift aid.

We have successfully retained a three-month cash reserve of funds to cover running costs. Our expenditure increased by £2000 in 2008, largely as a result of an increase in the support we provide detainees

Our two main grants came to an end in 2008, so a key focus for the coming year is to secure alternative funding to ensure the

future of the organisation. We face a real challenge in the current economic climate but will continue to focus our efforts on both formal and informal fundraising.

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 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 fundraising events.

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

Michelle Opit
Treasurer, SDV

Thanks

A special thank you to outgoing SDV coordinator, Kate Alexander

Since taking up employment with SDV in 2005 Kate Alexander has provided this organisation with as much passion, drive, dedication and skill as any organisation could hope for. She has been integral to all the changes and improvements that we have made over the last four years. We have grown as an organisation because of her focus and determination to make SDV as effective and supportive as possible for the people it was set up to help.

On behalf of all SDV's members, I would like to express our heartfelt thanks to Kate for all the hard work she has put in and wish her luck in her future endeavours. She will be sorely missed, but we look forward to welcoming her back as a volunteer member of SDV.

Catrin Evans
Chair

SDV Committee

Rima Al-Khalidi

Dan Brennan

Mary Kate Dickie

Catrin Evans (Chair)

Moya Flynn

Joanne Grant (Secretary)

Sophie Kavoukis (Vice
Chair)

Michelle Opit (Treasurer)

Other SDV Members

Katherine Ballingall

Ross Burnside

Michael Cameron

Mary Child

John Collins

Martin Deane

Jason Donald

Jim Dornan

Marion Fairweather

Christine Finnigan

Catriona Gibson

Claire Green

Razgar Hassan

Nicola Howard

Karen Leaney

Alistair Malloy

Clare Malloy

Siobhan McFadden

Dermot McGonigle

Linda McMahon

Linda McMillan

Nadia Mohammed

Garry Morrison

Michael O'Hagan

Claire Purcell

Stevie Purcell

Marie-Laure Ross

Jonathan Sharp

Mary Shields

Rachel Simpson

Jessie Sohal-Burnside

Alison Swinfen

Fibie Whitcelo

Paul Wilson

Gerry Wilson

SDV Funders

Allen Lane Foundation

Lloyds TSB Foundation
for Scotland

Voluntary Action Fund

Scottish Refugee Council

And

Everyone who donated,
sponsored, attended
events and set up
standing orders in 2008.