

Bulletin 16 January 2009

SDV News and events

Free Funds

On the "free funds" area of the easyfundraising website, there are lots of ways to raise funds for free for SDV. These include free trials with lovefilm (£8) and blockbuster (£6.25) and filling in a short survey for the chance to win a Honda civic (£2.50 donation). If we all did this, we could raise quite a lot of money! Go to easyfundraising using this link

<http://www.sdv.org.uk/id15.html>

Immigration, asylum and detention news

Lack of accountability is at heart of this mistreatment

A disturbing feature of Britain's record on immigration is the treatment of failed asylum-seekers. Successive governments have overseen the establishment of a system that is best suited to meeting deportation targets, rather than the care of some of the most vulnerable members of our society. Immigrants who have committed no criminal offence can be locked up for as long as three years. Failed asylum-seekers have few rights and often know very little about the legal system in which they are held. In such a climate, it is easy to see how those employed to guard them are in a position to abuse their power.

Allegations of racism and brutality are not new. Three years ago, the BBC uncovered evidence of ill-treatment against detainees at one immigration removal centre. The revelations, which included claims of serious assaults, led to the suspension of 15 employees of a security company that had a contract to guard them. But despite the hundreds of allegations of brutality made over the past five years, only a handful of guards have ever been disciplined.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/robert-verkaik-lack-of-accountability-is-at-heart-of-this-mistreatment-1334242.html>

BNP links to immigration service staff

An official investigation has been launched after two immigration service staff working with asylum-seekers were found to have links to the British National Party, The Independent has learnt.

One guard employed to look after asylum-seekers at a detention centre has been forced to resign after his name was found on a membership list of the BNP. Another man has been suspended while his employer investigates alleged links to the same far-right organisation.

Both cases raise serious concerns about racism within the immigration system, where

membership of extreme political groups has long been suspected. Over the past two years The Independent has helped reveal nearly 300 allegations of brutality, including 38 claims of racism, made by asylum-seekers about private security and immigration staff. Some of the allegations included abusive and racist language, in which refugees fleeing persecution were referred to as "monkeys" or told to "go back to their own countries".

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/bnp-links-to-immigration-service-staff-1334236.html>

News from AVID

The latest edition of In Touch is attached at the end of this bulletin

Other news and events

Benefit gig for Unity, Monday 19th January

Glasgow Student Action for Refugees

presents music from:

MUDHUTS
LEAN TALES
SPEARBRAVE
TAHIR TAHIRA

For a wonderful evening of entertainment to raise money for the Unity Centre



Lean Tales



Mud Huts

At the HALT Bar, Woodlands Road,
Monday 19th January
From 8pm

Suggested donation £2.00
Asylum seekers free

AVID Association of Visitors to Immigration Detainees

Patrons: Belinda Allan, Colin Firth, Lord David Ramsbotham, GCB, CBE and John Scampion, CBE
Registered Charity No. 1063784

in touch

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AVID contact details:

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AVID is looking for a dynamic project worker with experience of working with volunteers, prison regimes, and a knowledge of the issues facing post sentence ex foreign national prisoners. Closing date for applications; end January 2009. The tender documents are on the AVID website or contact Sally Tarshish (01845 250 690) .

London Detainees Support Group

To mark their 15th anniversary, LDSG are launching their research report on the UK's use of long-term detention. The report will document the human impact that detention of more than a year has on LDSG's clients. Alasdair McKensie (Doughty Chambers) and Alison Harvey (ILPA) will be guest speakers and poet and ex detainee, Clifton Cameron will read some of his poems. Entry is free and all are welcome but RSVP to Jerome@ldsg.org.uk

Date: Thursday 29th January 2009

Venue: Amnesty International Human Rights Centre, 17 – 25 New Inn Yard
London EC2A 3EA

Time: 6.30pm

Mackenzie Friend Training 2009

Next Mackenzie training sessions are:

Date: 16 May 09 Manchester

Date: 4 July 09 Ebury St, London

Contact Lilian (Admin@z2korg) for more details.

Medical Justice Training

5th Medical Justice Training for Independent Medics and others visiting Immigration Removal Centres

Date: Saturday 14th February 2009

Time: 9.30am to 4.00pm

Venue : Harrow Road Health Centre, 209 Harrow Road, London, W2 5EH.

Contact: Medical Justice for more details

News from the Detention estate;

GEO has emerged as the preferred bidder for Harmondsworth and has been given a three year contract commencing in June 2009. The centre will expand to a total capacity of 620 beds by 2010. GEO have managed Campsfield from 2006. A recent report from HMIP following an unannounced inspection (October 2008), described the centre as having 'lost direction and purpose' due in part to its uncertain future. The report urges the UK Border Agency to clarify the future of the centre as soon as possible - and also to resource and staff it properly for as long as it continues to exist.

Independent Asylum Commission

Many of you will have given evidence to the IAC over the last two years. The three reports produced are on its website at

www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk.

Citizens for sanctuary

www.citizensforsanctuary.org.uk will now be launching a new campaign in January 2009 to secure justice for people fleeing persecution and rebuild public support for sanctuary.

2009 Borders, Immigration and Citizenship Bill

(Update from ILPA)

1. On 14 January (or thereabouts), the Borders, Immigration and Citizenship Bill will receive its First Reading. Its process through Parliament will have begun. Second Reading will follow in a couple weeks or so after that.
2. However, the Borders, Immigration and Citizenship Bill is not the Bill to replace all current Immigration Acts with one "simplified" Act. It is just another addition to the panoply

of legislation in this area. As regards what it is likely to include - see below.

3. The intention is that later in the year, the Immigration Simplification Bill will be published in draft. This is the Bill to replace all current Immigration Acts. It should be a completed version of the draft Bill that was published last summer, and on which Medical Justice submitted their evidence to the Joint Committee on Human Rights. It seems pretty clear that this new and bigger draft Bill will not make it to a Bill being presented to Parliament before the next election.

Detention Services Orders

December saw a bevy of DSOs that affect asylum seekers in detention.

They are summarised below

DSO09/2008 Management of Detainees

Property for Removal – limits personal luggage allowance to 2 pieces of luggage of total weight no more than 20kg.

DSO13/2008 Handling of Complaints in IRCs etc

– establishes a complaints section at Green Park House, Croydon

DSO14/2008 Recording of Injuries

– detainees who allege that they have been assaulted should be examined by the Health Care Team as soon as possible, the nature of the injury placed on his medical record, and (subject to detainee's agreement) photographs taken and held with the medical record. If the assault is by a member of staff, of UKBA or Contractor, a complaint submitted as laid down in DSO13/2008

DSO15/2008 Paid Work – allows IRCs to offer paid work to detainees, but links it to a level of compliance with the centre operator (those on the enhanced level) and with the IKBA (those who are actively cooperating)

Work is limited to 15 hrs per week at either £1 or £1.25p per hour in addition to the standard daily allowance.

DSO16/2008 Guidance on Searching: Religious/Cultural considerations.

This gives guidance on the religious and cultural issues to be taken into consideration when searching detainees and visitors.

Contact AVID for full details.

Charges for Medical Records – an earlier order, **DSO 07/2008**, Charges for copies of Medical Records states that a standard charge of £10 should be made whenever a detainee or his representative requests a copy of the records held in a centre. There should be no extra charges for photocopying

or despatch, unless copies of x-rays are requested

Welfare standard

UKBA is still working on a welfare standard. Budget considerations make it unlikely that centres will be able to afford full time dedicated officers but it was agreed that a sharing of responsibilities for welfare across a number of officers did not produce an effective service. At the recent DUG meeting the following outline of the standard was given to stakeholders. There was disappointment expressed at the meeting that there had been no consultation.

- Standardisation of induction information
- Financial services (debts, accounts etc)
- Tracing services
- Recovery of property
- Transfer requests
- Limited legal assistance – phoning solicitors, bail form support
- Promoting voluntary departure
- Preparation for removal

Withdrawal of 7 years children's concession

(DP5/96 was a concession under which families with children who had been in the UK for 7 years or more could be considered for a grant of indefinite leave to remain (ILR). Recently, the High Court confirmed that the concession ought effectively to apply to the situation of unaccompanied children as well as children in families. Yesterday, the Government withdrew the concession. However, it should be noted that the withdrawal of the concession does not mean that families or children, who would have been granted ILR under the concession, should now face removal or deportation. Indeed, the Minister's statement (link below) expressly indicates that the purpose of the withdrawal is to reflect that it is not needed because of the application of the Human Rights Act 1998 and changes to the Immigration Rules. He does not say that the needs of the UK have changed in any way. Cases may still be brought under Article 8 (right to private and family life); and it follows that cases may succeed under Article 8 where they would have succeeded under the concession. Legal advice will be needed to assess the prospects in any individual case. http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmtoday/cmwms/archive/081209.htm#hdr_16

Liz Cox

19.01.09

