

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

89 (Feb 11)

AVID contact details:

Archway Resource Centre
1b Waterlow Road
London
N19 5NJ

Director: Ali McGinley
ali.mcginley@aviddetention.org.uk
0207 281 0533
07900 196 131

News from AVID

McKenzie Friends Training Date: 7th May

The next training date for all visitors interested in becoming a McKenzie Friend is Saturday 7th May in central London. A flyer with information has been circulated with this newsletter. The training costs £15 including a light lunch – participants are required to have some working knowledge of asylum and detention issues. For more information or a registration form, contact mckenziefriends@aviddetention.org.uk

Update on the Detention Estate

The latest update on the detention estate:

- **New short term holding facility: Larne, Northern Ireland:** this is due to open in the early summer. It will be operated by Reliance PLC under the new escorting contract, which starts on 1st May
- **Campfield House** – the new contract was awarded to Mitie Care and Custody.

(Note: Mitie have not run an IRC previously. The contract is worth £25 million over 5 years)

- **Dungavel House:** the new contract announcement will be made in March
- **Lindholme** planning application: the outcome on this is still awaited. (Note: this would mean an additional 240 beds)
- **Colnbrook:** a new women's unit will open at Colnbrook shortly. Work is currently underway. This will be a self contained unit for 8 women and will operate as a short term holding facility.
- **Yarl's Wood** – the former family unit has been partially converted to provide 36 additional female bed spaces. Total female beds are therefore 320. The remainder of the unit is currently open for childless couples or families with adult children. They account for 85 beds.
- **Morton Hall** is set to open in May with 392 beds

AVID is recruiting new trustees!

Please see the advert and details of this post- go to www.aviddetention.org.uk

Members Updates

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO GATWICK DETAINEE WELFARE GROUP!

GDWG is celebrating 15 years of providing essential support and advice to detainees at Tinsley and Brook House IRCs. To mark the occasion, GDWG is holding an anniversary celebration on the 1st March. The evening will include reflections from a number of members of the group past and present, as well as GDWG's patrons Baroness Williams and Lord Dholakia. The host for the evening will be Sheila Hancock.

GDWG are also publishing a book commemorating 15 years of their work

("Common Ground") as well as the first screening of an audio visual slideshow of their work.

Congratulations to Nic Eadie and his team, and all GDWG volunteers!

New name for London Detainee Support Group

LDSG will be changing its name to "Detention Action" in May 2011. This change reflects their growing national role in campaigning and lobbying for improvements to the detention system. LDSG will continue to support and advise detainees in the London area and use their evidence to push for change to national detention policy, in particular an end to indefinite detention.

The new name will be launched on 12th May 2011, with the publication of a research report on the Detained Fast Track asylum system. The launch event will be held at Amnesty International Human Rights Action Centre at 7pm. The report on Fast Track will draw attention to an essentially unfair system which unnecessarily breaches asylum-seekers' civil liberties. LDSG are conducting research into the extensive delays that are causing new asylum seekers to spend weeks in detention waiting for the Fast Track process to start.

Staff Changes at Dover Detainee Visitors Group

Sören Keil, Ex Detainee Project Manager is leaving DDVG. Interim contact for the project will be Juliette Wales, part time Ex-Detainee Project Manager.

Sören will be replaced by Christine Murphy who previously worked for RMJ. Christine will start work on the 1st March. The Ex Detainee Project is now shared between two people in a job share.

Best of luck to Sören for the future!

Haslar Visitors Group AGM/Detained Lives Roadshow

Haslar Visitors Group is holding their AGM on 2nd March, alongside a [Detained Lives Roadshow](#) from London Detainee Support Group. It will take place on Wednesday 2nd March 2011, at 7pm, at

All Saints Centre, Commercial Rd, Portsmouth PO1 4BT.

DDVG work with the Samaritans

Vebi and Marianela from the Dover Detainee Visitor Group were invited to run a workshop at the Samaritans South West Conference in Torquay 5-6 February 2011.

The workshop focused on collaborative work with the Samaritans and discussed the needs of detainees/ex-detainees as possible users of the Samaritans service. It was an interesting opportunity for DDVG to give the Samaritans more information on indefinite detention, as well as provide some context on the realities faced by detainees and ex detainees, which was a new area for them. The feedback was 100% positive and a conclusion reached was that visitors groups and Samaritans branches should work proactively together- for example in partnership events, training, publicity, informal support or even funding.

Yarl's Wood Befrienders New Telephone Number

You can now contact Heather and Tim at YWB on:

01234 272090

Detention News and Statistics

Latest Asylum Quarterly Statistics

The Home Office has released the latest asylum statistics for the 4th quarter of 2010 (October-December). Key findings include:

- A total of 6,610 entered detention in the period, 46% were asylum detainees.
- 27 children entered detention in the period.
- 6,490 people left detention. Of these, 63% were removed from the UK- 37% were therefore released back to communities under TA/TR, bail, leave to enter/remain or another reason.
- 1,225 foreign national prisoners were removed in the same period.
- 30 children left detention- 25 of whom (83%) were given TA/release.

Length of Detention

(Source: HoC Hansard, 25 Jan 2011)

A parliamentary question has revealed the 20 longest recorded lengths of detention of those detained as at 30 September 2010 (solely under immigration act powers, i.e. not under immigration and criminal powers). The highest recorded length of detention was 1,793 days or **just under 5 years** (4.9 years). 21 people had been held for over 2.7 years.

Detained Fast Track – statistics (Source: HoC Hansard, 20 Jan 2011)

In a response to a Parliamentary Question at the end of January, Damian Green provided information on the proportion of men and women detained under the fast track procedure and subsequently given leave to remain. The figures were higher for women than men, but worryingly the total was less than 1% for each year since 2005. Figures for 2009 and 2010, for example:

2009	Numbers	Granted
Male	1674	7
Female	510	11
Total	2184	8
2010	Numbers	Granted
Male	2061	7
Female	531	11
Total	2592	8

Reports

Campaign to Close Campsfield: Bail Observation Project (March 2011)

CCC are launching the results of their Bail Observation Project in March, "Immigration Bail Hearings: A Travesty of Justice?"

Two events will be held, in Oxford and London (see below). The report is based on the findings of a systematic study CCC carried out in observing 115 bail hearings. The authors note that "findings bear out our initial, more anecdotally based, concerns. We believe this report shows that what is required is root and branch reform of a fatally flawed system."

AVID Association of Visitors to Immigration Detainees | In Touch 89
www.aviddetention.org.uk

Some key findings include:

- From the 115 hearings only 33 detainees got bail; 22 applications were withdrawn, mainly (16) on the advice of the judge, but in at least two instances because of the judge's reputation for not granting bail (barrister's comments).
- Over 1/3 of applicants needed interpretation and this was particularly difficult if the application was heard via video-link. Interpretation was not always satisfactory and in one instance no interpreter was provided though one was needed.
- 75 detainees who were applying for bail had a legal representative: 28 of these were successful. Only 5 of the 40 applicants without legal representation were granted bail.

Launch Events:

Oxford: Tuesday 15 March, 7.30pm, Old Library, Town Hall, St Aldates, Oxford
Speakers will include the report's authors, a former detainee who obtained bail, and an immigration lawyer

London: Tuesday 22 March, 7pm, Committee Room, Houses of Parliament, Westminster
Chair: John McDonnell MP, other speakers to include report authors, bailee, immigration lawyer(s)

Copies of the 60-page illustrated report will be available at these meetings

New Campaign launched to raise awareness of UAMS

The 'Young People Seeking Safety' (YPSS) is a new network of individuals and organisations concerned about the rights and safety of unaccompanied young people seeking asylum. A series of events are planned to raise awareness of the issues, 28 March- 3 April. For more information on the group and activities involved, visit: www.youngpeopleseekingsafety.org.uk

'Coping with Destitution: Survival and Livelihood Strategies of refused asylum seekers living in the UK' (Feb 2011)

This new report from Oxfam looks at the coping mechanisms of those refused asylum. The findings highlight that many refused asylum seekers would rather live in poverty than access resources available to them – for fear of being deported. In the words of the authors, this 'results in a life that is robbed of dignity and unacceptable by human rights standards'. The report also notes that the fact that so many would rather live a hand to mouth existence rather than return to their country of origin suggests a failure of government policy. You can access the report on the Oxfam website or by clicking [here](#)

Lives in the Balance: The quality of immigration legal advice given to separated children seeking asylum [February 2011]

This new research was conducted at the Refugee Council in 2010. The report finds many examples of very good work, but 'too many' examples of poor practice. The result is that many children are not getting the best possible help in the asylum process. You can read the report [here](#).

The Children's Commissioner: Report 'Landing in Kent: the experience of unaccompanied children landing in Kent' (Feb 2011)

The Children's Commissioner, Maggie Atkinson, has published a new report on the experiences of young unaccompanied children who arrive at the Millbank Reception and Assessment Centre in Kent. The report makes several recommendations:

- The government should review the UK's actions on Dublin II
- The UKBA should ensure that children are never interviewed about matters other than basic personal details without an appropriate adult being present
- The government should reconsider plans to send 16 and 17 year old Afghans back to Kabul unless it is safe and in their best interest

You can read the full report [here](#)

AVID Association of Visitors to Immigration Detainees | In Touch 89
www.aviddetention.org.uk

Upcoming Events and Training Opportunities

COMPAS Breakfast meeting Friday 11th March: 'What are the alternatives to child detention?'

You can register for this event by email only: communications@compas.ox.ac.uk

Refugee Council Conference: Wednesday 23rd March "Working Together to protect Refugees"

The event will take place at their offices in Brixton between 11am and 3.30pm. Morning session will feature presentations from RCOs and NGOs who are successfully making a difference to the lives of refugees. The focus of the afternoon is on the challenges facing the refugee sector including a keynote speech from Roland Schilling, UNHCR representative in London. For more information visit the Refugee Council website.

Free accredited training: Introduction to Counselling and Supporting Refugee Women (Women and Girls Network)

This course is designed for refugee women who wish to develop understanding of counselling- no prior knowledge is required. The courses are held on Thursdays: May 12th, 19th, 26th and June 2nd, 9th, 16th and 23rd. Application forms are due by the 4th March. For more information visit www.wgn.org.uk

Campaign in Focus: Still Human Still Here

AVID is a member of the 'Still Human, Still Here' coalition. This brings more than 40 organisations together to end the destitution of thousands of refused asylum seekers in the UK. We believe that current government policy is inhumane and ineffective and urge the government to:

- Provide asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute with sufficient support so that they can meet their essential living needs until they are returned to their country of origin or are given permission to stay in the UK;
- Provide free access to healthcare for all asylum seekers while they are in the UK;

- Grant asylum seekers permission to work if their case has not been resolved within six months or they have been refused, but temporarily cannot be returned through no fault of their own ;
- Improve decision making and ensure that all those in need of protection receive it.

Call for support from Visitors Groups:

Mike Kaye, Advocacy Manager at SHSH has asked if visitors could consider contacting their MPs and asking them to sign a Declaration, calling on the government to grant permission to work for asylum seekers if their cases have not been resolved in 6 months or if they have been refused, but cannot be returned through no fault of their own. Over 80 MPs have already signed the Declaration which is a great start.

Visitors can contact their MPs easily through a number of web actions, which also give more background on the issue:

- Amnesty Website:
www.amnesty.org.uk/sleepout
- 38 Degrees website:
<http://www.38degrees.org.uk/permission-to-work>
- Refugee Council's website: <http://e-activist.com/ea-campaign/clientcampaign.do?ea.client.id=121&ea.campaign.id=7183>

Ali McGinley
February 2011