

DDVG wins Mentoring and Befriending Recognition Award



Sam Lake (DDVG Office Volunteer and Visitor) receiving the award from Camilla Sacre-Dallerup

In November 2010, DDVG won the regional final of the 'Mentoring and Befriending Recognition Awards 2010' in the Mentoring and Befriending Projects category. Camilla Sacre-Dallerup (Strictly Come Dancing professional dancer) gave a short speech before presenting the winners with a framed certificate and prize. The awards form part of a national campaign, called 'Supporting Life's Journeys', to celebrate and support the many individuals and organisations who help to address poverty and social exclusion through mentoring and befriending services. Continued on page 2.

'Detained Lives' Roadshow comes to Canterbury

On Wednesday 17th November 2010, the 'Detained Lives' campaign roadshow came to the University of Kent in Canterbury. Hosted by the London Detainee Support Group (LDSG), the roadshow aimed to highlight the plight of detainees held indefinitely at the Dover Immigration Removal Centre (DIRC), calling for an end to indefinite detention. Kent Refugee Help, DDVG, the Kent Law Clinic and special guest the Bishop of Dover the Right Reverend Trevor Willmott joined LDSG to form a panel to discuss the issues surrounding indefinite detention with the general public. Continued on page 3.

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Mentoring and Befriending Recognition Award



From left to right: Esther Rantzen, Sam Lake, Claire Parker, Miriam Wood and Steve Matthews

'The work of the volunteers and projects contributes enormous value to our society, not only by improving the quality of life for large numbers of people but by generating long term savings for the public purse.'

**Steve Matthews,
Chief Executive
of the Mentoring
and Befriending
Foundation**

Winning the Southeast regional award was not the end of the road for DDVG. After winning this award, DDVG were automatically shortlisted for the UK awards. Miriam Wood (Chairperson), Claire Parker (Project Administrator) and Sam Lake (Office Volunteer and Visitor) attended the national awards ceremony on Wednesday 15th December 2010 which took place in London. Although DDVG did not win the national award for Mentoring and Befriending Project, DDVG received another framed certificate. On collection of the certificate on stage, Esther Rantzen interviewed DDVG, asking questions regarding indefinite detention, the nationalities of those held in the Dover Immigration Removal Centre, and how DDVG helps detainees and supports the campaign against social exclusion. It has just been confirmed that Esther Rantzen will be making a visit to DDVG on Wednesday 6th April 2011.

Esther Rantzen CBE, best known for her work in journalism, presenting on television and most importantly in the charity sector as the founder of 'Childline', hosted the event. She gave an introductory speech to open the ceremony which highlighted her passion for helping those most vulnerable in society and her ongoing support for mentoring and befriending services. Steve Matthews, Chief Executive of the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation, also gave a short speech detailing the benefits that mentoring and befriending services can bring for those most disadvantaged in our communities, for example, an improved quality of life.

After the acceptance of the awards for the different categories, the nominees were invited to participate in an online dance world record attempt. As quoted by 'Supporting Life's Journeys, 'The Dance' represents 'the steps through life that mentors and befrienders take together with those they support.' Celebrities are also backing the campaign including Zoe Tyler, Peter Duncan and Camilla Sacre-Dallerup. To participate in this world record attempt, please find out more information on 'Supporting Life's Journeys' website: <http://www.supportinglifesjourneys.org>.

The event finished with an opportunity for networking with the accompaniment of mince pies and mulled wine.

'Detained Lives' Roadshow comes to Canterbury



The Bishop of Dover the Right Reverend Trevor Willmott introduced the meeting and spoke about his involvement with detainees at the DIRC, stating that 'detention is a waste of time, a waste of money, and a waste of human life.' He added that the plight of indefinitely held detainees does not end if and when they are released due to mental health issues, maintaining that the 'psychological deterioration of detainees who have been diagnosed with mental illness is surely disproportional to the ends sought by immigration control.' Finally, the Bishop explained how 'statistics are easy to brush off, but behind each statistic are people, fragile human beings with hopes and fears' and that 'many have sought protection in our country, and yet are treated with a disturbing dis-regard for their human rights.'

Alexis Wood and Sha from LDSG gave a PowerPoint presentation concerning their findings on indefinite detention. There was also a screening of the award winning short movie '1000 voices'. Speakers at the event included Victor Fiorini (Volunteer Detainee Manager, DDVG), Charles Atangana (former detainee), Lucy Williams (Kent Refugee Help) and Catherine Carpenter (Kent Law Clinic).

The event was a great success, with around 250 people attending. It has raised more awareness concerning indefinite detention and will hopefully contribute to its end. To read LDSG's latest report, 'No return, no release, no reason', please visit <http://www.ldsg.org.uk/files/uploads/NoReasonReport0910.pdf>.

Lunch with Detainees

On Wednesday 15th December 2010, detainees at the Dover Immigration Removal Centre enjoyed a lunch with DDVG staff and volunteers. This was the second time that DDVG were invited to have lunch with detainees. It gave DDVG members the opportunity to have a meal with detainees in the dining room and to talk to them in a less controlled environment.

Destitution Explained

'Destitution – it sounds as if people have been put in a bin and are scavenging. It makes me sound like an animal. Perhaps that is what I am now. All I am.'

67 year old woman from Zimbabwe (Refugee Action, The Destitution Trap: Asylum's Untold Story, 2006)

'Asylum seekers come to Britain and are immediately given free homes and full benefits.'



What?

It is a common misconception that asylum seekers come to Britain and have an easy life, causing myths like those in the blue speech bubbles. However, they are not allowed to claim mainstream welfare benefits and they are not permitted to work. Whilst waiting for a decision on their immigration status, many asylum seekers are therefore forced into a life of destitution. So, what does it mean to be destitute and what are the consequences?

Who?

'I feel that I am waiting for nothing, stuck in a limbo, in-between.

I can't work, I can't go home, I can't get any support. I feel as if I am wasting my life.'

36 year old man from Sudan (Refugee Action, The Destitution Trap: Asylum's Untold Story, 2006)

According to the *Immigration and Asylum Act 1999*, a person is destitute if (a) he/she **does not have adequate accommodation** or any means of obtaining it or (b) he/she has adequate accommodation or the means of obtaining it, but **cannot meet his/her other essential living needs**. However, destitution can also be defined in terms of its effects or symptoms, for example, homelessness.

The *Asylum Support Appeals Project (ASAP)* states that the main group affected by destitution in the UK are **refused asylum seekers**. Any support that an asylum seeker may have been receiving is stopped 21 days after they receive a final negative decision on their asylum claim. However, there is an exception to this rule, for example, when an asylum seeker has dependent children in their household before their asylum claim is determined. Only then is the person entitled to support until they leave the UK voluntarily or they are removed. Other than this exception, refused asylum seekers are expected to return to their countries of origin voluntarily. (ASAP, *Not Destitute Enough*, 2008).

It must also be noted that the other group affected by destitution in the UK are **ex-detainees**. Life after detention can be difficult for ex-detainees due to perhaps not having any family or friends to depend on, not having stable accommodation and having no money to buy life essentials.



'Britain is a "soft touch" for asylum seekers.'

Why?

According to the *Asylum Support Programme Inter-Agency Partnership* (IAP), there are four main reasons why asylum seekers become destitute:

1. A person wants to claim asylum but has **not yet been able to**, for example, due to travel difficulties.
2. A person has claimed asylum and is eligible for support but is **not receiving it**, perhaps because of a **delay in the application process** or because they **failed to meet the requirements**.
3. A person has been **refused asylum** and **all rights of appeal have been exhausted**. They are either not eligible for support or if they are, there are delays in the application process.
4. A person has been granted asylum and they have **found it difficult to access mainstream welfare benefits** either due to **language barriers** or **delays in documentation**. (Kate Smart and Sarah Fullegar, *The Destitution Tally*, 2008)

Therefore, destitution can affect asylum seekers at every stage of the asylum process, particularly where applicants fall through gaps in the support system.

Effects?

Effects of destitution can be wide-ranging:

1. **Physical and mental health** problems - Lack of food can affect an asylum seeker's physical health and those destitute can suffer from depression, anxiety and vulnerability. They can also feel disempowered due to their dependence on support.
2. **Social problems and exploitation** - Their dependency on family and friends can cause strains on relationships. Finally, as asylum seekers are not permitted to work, they often participate in irregular, exploitative employment which can be dangerous.

The *ICAR Briefing 2006* report on destitution in the UK describes the 'spiralling nature of destitution' whereby 'physical health problems can affect the ability to address the problems of destitution, while mental health problems can affect an individual's confidence in the system and desire to appeal against a negative decision.' (ICAR Briefing 2006)

What's in the news?

Child detention to end May 2011



In December 2010, the Government announced that the family wing of Yarl's Wood immigration removal centre would be closed immediately and that there will be an end to the detention of children for immigration purposes by May 2011. On Thursday 16th December, deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg declared that the immigration system would be 'fairer and more compassionate', creating an 'asylum system which maintains its integrity but crucially upholds basic standards of decency.' Following this announcement, Nick Clegg stated that there would be no children detained in removal centres at Christmas 2010.

The coalition pledged to end the detention of children when they came into office in May 2010 but have been criticised for the lack of urgency in implementing this needed policy.

Detention of two children of failed asylum seekers ruled 'unlawful'

On 11th January 2011, the High Court ruled that the detention of two children of failed asylum seekers was 'unlawful'. Asylum seekers Ms Reetha Suppiah from Malaysia and Ms Sakinat Bello from Nigeria were arrested and detained in February 2010 with their children for between 12 and 17 days after UK Border Agency raided their homes. Both mothers claim that the detention of their children has caused them distress and unnecessary trauma.



Mr Justice Wyn Williams ruled that although the policy itself was not unlawful, it had been applied in an unlawful way, stating that the 'claimants were detained unlawfully from the time they were taken into custody until their release.' He added that there was 'a significant body of evidence' demonstrating that they had suffered breaches of human rights therefore the two single mothers would be entitled to claim damages. Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights had been breached along with their Article 5 right to liberty.

However, UKBA is said to be disappointed by the 'High Court's findings in relation to two specific cases but will not be seeking permission to appeal at this stage.' David Wood of the UK Border Agency added that they would be looking at this judgement to see if there are 'lessons to learn' for the future.

Legal aid cuts



In August 2010, the Legal Services Commission (LSC) announced its plan to reduce the number of firms able to offer social, welfare and family legal aid. Donna Covey, Chief Executive of the Refugee Council described the move as ‘unacceptable’. She added that ‘slashing funding for legal aid and restricting the number of law firms that can provide it means asylum seekers will either be forced to pay for legal services themselves or, more likely, to go without.’ As asylum seekers are not permitted to work, their only option is to rely on publicly funded legal advice.

The government have set out to make savings of £350 million in 2014-15 from legal aid, as stated in the Green Paper. Some of these savings are to be made by withdrawing legal aid from all non-asylum matters. Although asylum matters would remain protected, asylum support would not. In addition, challenges made by detainees about their detention will remain funded but only those matters directly relating to their detention and/or asylum claim. Therefore, this excludes an immigration application that a detainee might want to make whilst detained.

Official statistics have shown that 48% of immigration cases succeed at appeals therefore the idea that immigration matters could be at risk of being withdrawn from public funding is an extremely worrying thought. The consultation on legal aid cuts is open until 12pm on 14th February 2011.

Detainees paid 50p an hour in Yarl’s Wood

It was reported at the beginning of January by *The Guardian* that women detained at the Yarl’s Wood detention centre are being paid a mere 50p an hour for ‘menial work’. The female detainees have accused UK Border Agency and Serco (the outsourcing company that runs the centre) of exploitation, describing the work as ‘modern-day slavery’.

Detainees are employed to work alongside UKBA staff to serve food in the canteen and clean up after meals. According to UKBA’s guidance of 2008, detainees are to be paid £1 per hour for routine work and a higher rate of £1.25 per hour for particular projects like painting a room. Furthermore, under immigration laws, detainees are exempt from the minimum wage. Refugee groups have described it as a ‘cruel irony’ seeing that asylum seekers are not permitted to work in the community.



Nordia Hylton, a former detainee in Yarl’s Wood for 11 months, stated: ‘People who work without papers to try and feed their families are arrested for illegally working and detained. But once they get to Yarl’s Wood they can work for next to nothing. The UKBA and Serco are hypocrites. They are taking advantage of people’s situation.’ Although a spokesman for Serco refused to comment, a UKBA spokesperson said: ‘Immigration detainees have always been able to volunteer for paid work and, in fact, the UK chief inspector of prisons has recommended that the amount of paid work available to detainees should increase. Detainees in immigration centres are exempt from the minimum wage. This voluntary work is not a substitute for the work of trained staff, and is, in fact, popular among detainees.’

Quick Quiz

- 1. If you enter the UK illegally, how long do you have to contact the authorities and claim asylum?**
 - (a) Three days
 - (b) Unlimited
 - (c) 24 hours
- 2. More people leave the UK every year than settle here as migrants or refugees.**

True or false?
- 3. Someone who is forced to flee their home but who remains within their country's borders is called a refugee.**

True or false?

Answers

1. (b), 2. True, 3. False. They are an internally displaced person.

Christmas Meal



From left to right: Bryan Kendall, Miriam Wood, Eve and Martin Clark

This year DDVG had its annual Christmas Meal at Blue Birds Restaurant in Dover. Volunteers, members of the committee and ex-detainees enjoyed a buffet provided by the restaurant before being entertained by Bryan Kendall (volunteer) with some folk singing!

If you have any clothes, suitcases or bags that you wish you donate, please bring them to the DDVG office or contact Claire on 01303 242755. They would be much appreciated due to the current shortage.

Detainee Corner



Dolphin (Jamaica)
Created by a detainee

Although Christmas is over, please check out <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UN6lQAdRiWQ> to listen to the Dover detainees' Christmas song, 'We Wish You a Merry Christmas'

Dates for your Diary

02/03/11 6.30-8pm — Independent Monitoring Board Talk for DDVG Volunteers (DDVG Office)

06/04/11 12.45-2pm — Esther Rantzen to visit DDVG. Open to all volunteers

06/04/11 2-4pm — Support Meeting for Volunteers

09/06/11 - Ex-detainee Conference (Amnesty International UK Headquarters, London)

28/09/11 11-1pm — Annual General Meeting

If you would like to attend any of the events please e-mail to info@ddvg.org.uk or phone the office on 01304 242755

Quick Link

If you would like to learn more about legal aid cuts, follow this link to read the Institute of Race Relations' paper, 'Excluding Migrants from Justice: The Legal Aid Cuts'

http://www.irr.org.uk/pdf2/IRR_Briefing_No.7.pdf