

Submission for Detention Inquiry – African Community Centre

1. The African Community Centre supports refugees and asylum seekers living in the Swansea area. Support includes trauma counselling, therapeutic activities, English lessons, volunteer and training opportunities, youth forum and a platform to share their views on public sector service provision.
2. The African Community Centre has been providing 1:1 support for Sylvia Nkgodi to overcome the lasting impact of the experiences she endured in detention.
3. In April 2004, Ms Nkgodi fled Botswana after experiencing domestic violence at the hands of her husband. Her husband repeatedly beat her with a gun and stick, and used to lock her in a cupboard like a prisoner. Ms Nkgodi still has head injuries inflicted by her husband.
4. In February 2013 Ms Nkgodi was detained at Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre. While at Yarl's Wood Ms Nkgodi had access to a lawyer; to befrienders; to healthcare where she continued her medication and was able to access weekly counselling sessions. Ms Nkgodi says she was treated well.
5. Prior to being detained, Ms Nkgodi had hanged herself in an attempt to take her own life, and made Yarl's Wood aware of this on her arrival. However, she was still detained.
6. While in detention and having weekly counselling sessions, Ms Nkgodi told her counsellor that she wanted to take her life. The counsellor made security aware of Ms Nkgodi's intentions, and their response was to increase security rather than to offer psychiatric support or increased counselling sessions.
7. Six months into detention, Ms Nkgodi acted on her intentions and attempted to commit suicide. Yarl's Wood reacted to this by guarding Ms Nkgodi at all times, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. No additional mental health provision was put in place.
8. Ms Nkgodi says in Yarl's Wood there was no peace nor privacy – it felt like a prison. For Ms Nkgodi this brought back memories of the trauma she had fled from, with the feeling of being locked up by her husband, awaiting her next beating. This was made worse by staff walking into her room without knocking, which gave her a shock and contributed to degrading her mental health.
9. Now living in the community, Ms Nkgodi experiences the after effects of detention every day. Her screaming wakes her from her sleep, and has repeated nightmares that people in uniform from Yarl's Wood are coming to take her back into detention. She experiences grave trauma, fear, flashbacks and panic attacks.
10. In the last month, Ms Nkgodi has received a letter from the Home Office, stating she is a person who is likely to be detained. This has increased her anxiety and fear, and she has said that she would take her own life rather than go back into detention.

11. The scars of detention have an effect on the staff at the African Community Centre. Staff who regularly support people who have been through trauma suffer from the effects of processing trauma and empathising with the person, leading to vicarious trauma. Additionally, staff are on high alert monitoring and checking service users are coping. This diverts staff time away from daily activities of supporting refugees and asylum seekers.