

Parliamentary Inquiry into Immigration Detention

Personal statement –Anonymous

1. I have been detained at Yarlswood on two occasions. The first time was for 2 months and 2 weeks following a 3 month sentence at Holloway HMP for immigration offences. The second time was for 2 months.
2. I have suffered with mental health issues for years and have been receiving on-going support and care from the Helen Bamber Foundation. I have taken various types of medication and taken part in many forms of therapy to help me with my condition.
3. Being locked up in detention, on both occasions, have had a huge impact on my mental health problems.
4. Last year I was living with a friend, waiting for a decision from the Home office, coping with my mental health issues through regular support from the Helen Bamber Foundation, when I was arrested again. The authorities had come to a friend's house, where I was visiting, to see them. I was targeted by the authorities and taken. I didn't understand why until I was told I was going to be sent back to my country.
5. I asked if I could shower and clean myself up, I was on my period, had nothing with me to stay clean and didn't know how long it would be before I was allowed home. The officer refused-they didn't care and I was held at Beckett House from 11am-8pm, feeling dirty and needing help.
6. I was treated like dirt, I told them I need to call my solicitor, that I am receiving help from the Helen Bamber Foundation and I shouldn't be detained. They didn't care. It wasn't until a fax was sent over proving what I had told them they allowed me to shower and they treated me like a human being.
7. I was taken to Yarlswood, I had been there before and knew the conditions and treatment I would be subjected to - it was frightening. It wasn't until 4am before I was processed and allowed into a room where I would be staying. I was tired, had no belongings, confused, frightened and with no medication or support that I had been receiving while living with my friend.
8. There were many incidents of not being treated fairly while I was detained. I didn't expect anything different as I had experienced it before. Some of the male officers take advantage of the female detainees. On one occasion I was showering when a particular officer came into the room, using his key and without knocking. I was naked and vulnerable, he apologised but didn't look away and started a conversation. I shouted at him to get out, which he did in the end. When I spoke about this to some of the other women, they too had had similar experiences with this officer.

9. Some of the officers referred to me as 'mad woman'-for example 'hey, you mad woman, go to your room'. Another woman was known as 'fat woman', she made an official complaint and I think she was given an apology. Either way, these sort of insults should not be happening.
10. I had a number of dealings with the healthcare department at Yarlswood. They knew I needed medical care due to my mental health issues and I was receiving weekly counselling. There was a female counsellor who was helpful but I was then sent to a male counsellor. He didn't help me at all, all he said to me was about my case and that I need to accept I am going to be deported and there is nothing I can do about it. He said I wasn't believed and that I was not going to win my case. I was upset, this is not what I needed to see a counsellor about, through my experience with the Helen Bamber Foundation I know that a counsellor's job is not to advise you about your immigration case!
11. I was put through an extremely stressful and upsetting experience whilst detained at Yarlswood last year. I was booked for a medical scan at Bedford hospital and I was getting ready to be taken to the appointment by officers. I was told that morning that I would not be going for my scan, as I had to go to my country's embassy to apply for documents to force me to leave the UK. I was shocked and scared as I knew it was important for me to have this scan and was worried about my health. I said I had no knowledge of the appointment at the embassy and I can't go because of my urgent medical scan. The officer said I will be physically forced to go if I make a fuss.
12. I managed to speak to my solicitor who had no knowledge of the embassy appointment and said he would contact the centre manager. Eventually the officer in question came to see me and said there had been a mix-up and it was in fact an appointment at the embassy for my room-mate. As the officers and staff at Yarlswood know, I had mental health issues and was receiving help but they didn't once take any of this into consideration and actually look into the matter before issuing threats on me.
13. I was eventually taken to Bedford hospital for my medical scan. I was taken by two officers, in handcuffs, to see the nurse. This was degrading and unnecessary. What did they seriously think I would do? The room I was taken into only had one door but the officer insisted in coming into the consultation room until the nurse had to forcefully ask him to leave and remove my handcuffs. The officers stood guard at the door outside, I am sure they were listening.
14. I had been told before my medical scan to ensure I had a full bladder. After the scan I really needed to go to the toilet. The officers would not let me go. I was escorted back to the taxi and we set off back to Yarlswood. I kept saying I needed the toilet but they wouldn't take any notice. We got held up in a lot of traffic during the journey, I kept insisting I needed the toilet. I must have looked distressed as while we were stationary in the traffic people were looking at us and a policeman came over to ask what was going on. The policeman said to the officers I should be allowed to go to the toilet, however nothing was done.

15. I had no choice but to go where I was. I was sat in the back of the taxi, handcuffed, with officers there, sitting in urine, in wet clothes. I was humiliated. It was degrading. I felt like I was being treated like an animal.
16. I arrived back in reception at Yarlswood and a female officer escorted me in to be processed. I said I needed to go to the toilet; again I was refused until I was processed. I believe they were delaying as I had been perceived as being 'difficult' in the taxi because I kept going on about needing to go. I stood in reception and urinated on the floor where I was. My clothes were soaked with urine and I had no choice. Other detainees were removed from the area and I was left to feel dirty, humiliated and unworthy of humane treatment.
17. When I was released from detention, after the Home Office accepted I shouldn't have been detained in the first place, I was being processed and was told that they had 'misplaced' my mobile phone. Not only did my phone have all my contacts in it, but my friend had kindly bought it for me, it had sentimental value. While the discharge officer was looking for it I was told the van to take me to the station was leaving and I had to hurry up. I was forced to leave without my mobile phone, I was given a spare phone (probably someone else's that this had happened to).
18. At first when you are released and you walk out of those locked doors, you feel relief. Then you realise how much of an impact it has had on your life. I wasn't at home upon my arrest, I had been living with friends and they had been told that I had been removed back to my country. I had lost all my belongings - things you collect and hold dear to you - it may not be of any value to other people but to me, notes from people I care about, clothes I had been given, items that are personal to me are all I had. I came out and had nothing.
19. I hope that I will never be detained again. My case is progressing and I have a good solicitor, the Helen Bamber Foundation has helped me through tough times and continues to do so. Briefly I imagine a time when I can try to heal and live a secure life, however most of the time my thoughts are will I be detained again, I live in constant fear.