

## **Manchester Testimony 1**

I do not want to give my name. I'm from Zimbabwe and I was detained in 2012 by the UKBA. I was a live-in carer for an old man and about 20 people came to his house to detain me. Why did they need so many. I am not violent criminal. They were very aggressive and shouting loudly at me. One woman shouted 'You have no right to be here.' I kept calm and didn't shout back and they quietened after a while. There was no one to care for the man so I had to stay a few hours until someone arrived to take over. I was under strict guard and male guards even came in the toilet with me. I was so embarrassed. They did not believe the old man wasn't involved and searched the house. They left it in a terrible state. They were very rough - lot of verbal abuse and shouting. The man was very distressed.

Eventually I was taken to a cell. It felt like prison. I am not a criminal and have never been in prison but it felt like a prison. After 2 days I was taken to Yarl's Wood. They took us in a van after midnight. The journey was so awful. It was freezing cold and I had no warm clothes with me. It was uncomfortable and rough and bumped around.

### **1) Your experiences of living in immigration detention, including the context and duration of your stay:**

I was in detention in Yarl's Wood for 2 months, and I was released in 2012. I had claimed asylum and was working as it took long and I can't sit doing nothing. They found out I was working. I put a fresh claim in at in 2012 and am still waiting. I got section 4.

It was terrible from my arrest. I was living in a cell for 2 days. there was no privacy for bathing or the toilet. Males walked past all the time and came into the bathroom. I had no dignity. On arrival at Yarl's Wood they took my medication away from me and I had to wear Yarl's Wood clothes - a horrible track suit. The experience is horrible. There is no peace, no rest. Every door is locked behind you all day you hear doors banging all the time. They are always checking you. Men (male guards) come into your room all the time whenever they want. They come into the bathroom while you are naked in the shower and come when you are sitting on the toilet. This is so shameful.

There is constant noise and women screaming. You have to share rooms with women who are very ill or depressed. You are really scared in there. The windows don't open and there is no outside space to get fresh air. There is a gym but not everyone is allowed to use it. There is nothing at all to do. Even if you knit you are allowed 1 hour with a guard then they take everything off you. You can't take knitting needles to your room. The choice of books is very bad so you can't read. I am not used to doing nothing. It is so bad.

It made me want to die. I couldn't bear being kept in those conditions. I am not a criminal.

### **2) The conditions in immigration detention, including your ability to access services such as legal advice, healthcare, pastoral support;**

My phone was taken off me. I had to wait as they do not have enough phones for everybody then was given a basic one with no camera after a few days. It was 02 network which is very expensive. I had access to a lawyer but they were not helpful and only wanted money from me. My step daughter is a UK citizen and helped me.

Visiting was hard. They make it so awful people don't want to come. They have to register and fingerprints and everything. Some people are scared to visit in case they are arrested. Even visitors feel like criminals.

### **3) Whether there were appropriate mechanisms to deal with any mental, physical or emotional issues you may have experienced prior to or during your time in detention;**

The healthcare was awful. I know what medication I need but they didn't believe me. They gave me medication I was allergic to and I told them but they made me take it. I got a terrible allergic reaction so they put me in isolation for 2 weeks. No one came in the room. They just put the food in through the door and left it. I had no one. I missed my bail hearing. Then I was so ill I had to go to the hospital. I was taken there by 4 great big men. Why did they need to do that for just me? It was so humiliating. The other patients must

think I am a murderer or something like that to need such guards. They wouldn't leave me but the doctor made them leave the room so that he could speak to me.

**4) Any longer-term impacts of detention on you, your family and/or your wider community;**

I have never forgotten. It has never left me. I get flashbacks. I see people coming for me in the night so sleeping is very difficult. I am frightened of every knock on the door. It is the postman or someone but I think they are coming for me again. I am scared when I see a policeman. It affects my concentration. I am scared all the time. I feel it would have been better to die under Mugabe than go through this.

It has a longer term impact on the mind because I still haven't got a decision so I am waiting and worrying all the time.

**5) Any other information about detention that you would like to share;**

I have not been in a prison ever but the detention centre felt like prison and like I had committed a terrible crime.

When I was released I was told with no warning. He came to my room and said 'You - come and give us an address now' - I didn't know why. It was 5 pm. Later they came and shouted at me 'You are going out get your things.' They took me out at night with no notice. I had never been to Bedford before and it was dark. They took me to the railway station, gave me a ticket and I had to get back to Manchester that night. I was so scared. It is a bad way to treat people.

I feel I was treated as an animal, not human. It is torture in a way, mental torture.

**6) How far does the current detention system support the needs of vulnerable detainees, including pregnant women, detainees with a disability and young adults?**

A lot of people in detention are very young or very old or mentally ill or pregnant. It makes no sense to keep them there. There is no need to lock women up. Using male guards is inappropriate.

**7) There is currently no time limit on immigration detention – in your view what are the impacts (if any) of this?**

The uncertainty is hard to bear. Your life is in limbo. No one tells you anything about how long you will stay or if you are going to get deported. I could have been there any time or they could take me to the plane.

**8) What are the wider consequences of the current immigration detention system, including any financial and/or social implications?**

It is wrong to stop asylum seekers from working. Spoon feeding them with housing bills and vouchers is wrong. No one wants to sit and do nothing. Most people have worked hard in their country and want to work. Years of this make people mentally disturbed.

This system makes English people hate asylum seekers. They just see us as taking because we do not work or pay tax. They do see what we can contribute. We can do many things but are not allowed.

**9) How effective are the current UK alternatives to detention (e.g. bail, reporting requirements)? Are viable alternatives to immigration detention in operation in other countries?**

You should be allowed to work and study and contribute while you are waiting for a decision so you are not a burden.

People should not be detained but given work to do so they earn. My £35 a week comes from an English person paying tax. I should be able to earn it myself.

The signing system is very hard when you are on weekly signing. It feels like a punishment. They punish you if you can't get there if you are ill. I forgot once because of my medication. They rang me and I didn't even realise I should have gone. I went very early the next day. They took me in the room and read out a paper saying what they could do to me and said I could go to prison for many years because I didn't sign.

Make signing less often and near where you live. It is long to travel and if you don't have money it's hard to get there.

**10) Tell us what wishes you have for change to the UK detention system...**

Stop leaving people to wait years for a decision. Look at cases properly and make fair decisions. Investigate the reasons and conditions that make people leave - ask why people would leave their homes and families.

Stop putting people in detention and making them prisoners and criminals when they have come seeking protection.

Let people help themselves and work when they are waiting for a decision.