

Liverpool Testimony 2

I'm originally from Somalia, and lived in Gambia, but I'm stateless. I've been in the UK since November 2009. I'd prefer not to give my name.

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

I was arrested in June 2010. My sentence was for 18 months but in the end I was in prison for 3 years and then in detention for one month. I was in Dovegate and then Featherstone Prison, then Colnbrook detention centre. I applied for asylum from prison. I served 18 months more of my sentence, and one in detention because they said I refused to give my true identity. This isn't true. I'm stateless. The Home Office were trying to treat me as a Gambian and they tried to send me to the embassy for documents, but I'm not a citizen of that country.

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

It's very difficult to get legal advice in prison. Before you can make any phone calls you need to fill in a request form and give the phone number. Sometimes it took them ages to process the request. I didn't always know which number to try.

I got help from Bail for Immigration Detainees, but photocopying documents was difficult. The staff didn't treat them well. They were private but they showed them to everybody. They would leave them open in the store room for everyone to see. They didn't respect my confidentiality.

I had a friend and his mum who would visit me. It made me feel less alone. It wasn't too hard to arrange for them to visit. These friends paid for my phone credit, which really helped. I don't know what I'd have done without them.

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.

I got some depression medication and something for my skin prescribed in prison, but when I moved to Dovegate they didn't let me bring it. They thought I'd try and hide a phone or drugs in it, but how is this possible? I was already in prison.

The doctor wouldn't give me a repeat prescription. I made a complaint and the Immigration Officer came to see me but he just said I was wasting taxpayers' money. But later I went to see the nurse and she prescribed it for me. Why did it take so long?

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

I got depressed in detention, and it lasted afterwards. I'd never been depressed before that.

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

Lots of people get depressed in detention and I think there's a real risk they will commit suicide.

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

They can do what they like with you. I stayed in prison for 18 months longer than I should. They didn't know what to do with me and didn't let me go.

7) Are the current arrangements for authorizing detention appropriate?

It isn't fair at all. You should have pre-warning and they should explain. People need to have their stuff with them. They need to be able to see their solicitor and get their paperwork. One guy I knew from Nigeria was deported straight away. All his stuff was left in Liverpool and his church

committee had to send it to him. It was really expensive. If you don't have friends you could lose everything.

8) 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?

I'm on a tag now. I can't go anywhere. I can't go to the Mosque to pray in the night. I've asked the Home Office for permission to vary the times, but they won't let me...

I think it's better to stay in detention than be on a tag or reporting. At least in detention the Home Office has to write to you every week and explain what's happening with your case. Now I go to report every week and they say 'Thank you, bye... Thank you, bye' but you never know when it's going to come to an end.