

# Inquiry into the use of Immigration Detention

## Written Submission of Evidence

1. From last May until July 2013 I was detained in Yarlswood - almost two months. I was about 6 months pregnant at the time I went into detention.
2. Detention is like prison. Although you can get access to the little courtyard park in the middle of the buildings to get some fresh air, otherwise they keep you locked in. The doors are closed. The food at least is okay. I don't know about others experiences, but because I was about 6 months pregnant the main problem I had was with the nurses.
3. It is so stressful being there. I cried all the time. Every week they take people back to their home countries on chartered planes. When that happened, people would be crying and screaming like someone had died. Every day they would bring more people into the detention centre on these full coaches – I don't know where they picked them up from. People killed themselves. Before I got there, one person did kill herself. When I was there three people tried to do kill themselves. Then, whenever someone had tried to kill herself, the security guys would sit in front of her door 24-7, monitoring her so she won't do it again.
4. Because of all this I had so much stress. Because I was pregnant, I would get dizzy and sick. Sometimes two of the guards had to hold me up and carry me to the clinic. I was afraid all the time that I would get dizzy and fall. It wasn't the right place to be for me – I stressed so much, I was so worried I would damage the baby.
5. When you are complaining they don't take you seriously. There was a clinic there, with nurses, but they don't believe you. They will wait for something to happen – for you to fall down or become very ill – before they believe what you are saying is true. They wouldn't believe me when I say I was dizzy, they thought I was just trying to get out of detention.
6. Some of the staff are very nice, but some of them are very horrible. Some of them, even when you are talking to them, they don't want to listen. There was one particular nurse who was so rude. It was a guy, Stanley Sarkey (I think,

because I read it on his badge). When I came to him feeling stressed, sick and dizzy, he asked what did I want to do? He said, 'this isn't Buckingham palace' and I should not complain.

7. The nurses and doctors in particular, they should listen to and believe people. I know that some girls do pretend to be depressed and pretend to take medicine. But when you are speaking about what is happening to you, they need to find some way to believe you. If we are complaining, they must find a way to listen to us – not everyone in detention is pretending.
8. I cried throughout that time because no one was listening to me. I knew I was dying inside, sometimes I was so scared. I would feel so weak and dizzy, I was worried to get up out of the bed in case I fell down and hurt my baby. I would feel ill, but I knew that there is no point to go to the clinic because they won't take it seriously. The stress put me out of my mind, it was too much. I couldn't eat properly or sleep.
9. The most humiliating things would happened. Any time I had an appointment in a hospital like a scan, the hospital would write me a letter and then a car would come and pick me up to take me to the appointment. One time, on the way to the scan they had two officers in the car with you – like you are some kind of criminal. In the hospital these two giant officers in uniform came with me and sat with me. Everyone was looking at me like I was a criminal, like I was a murderer and I had murdered someone. I was so embarrassed. At one time I wanted to get up and get some water from the dispenser – but they wouldn't even let me stand up to get the water. I had to sit next to one of the officers and then the other fetched the water. All the time people were looking at me.
10. There was a counsellor there I could see, and some befrienders came. The befrienders helped, me so much. They brought me clothes: because I had been picked me up when I was on the way to sign at the reporting centre, I didn't have any clothes with me at all. Befrienders brought me clothes to wear.
11. They also helped with the lawyer. I had such a problem with the lawyer – with legal aid. When I entered detention I didn't know anything about lawyers, I didn't know anything. My roommate said I should look for a lawyer: she took me by the

hand and took me to find a lawyer – they had so many there. I had Duncan Lewis, but that legal aid lawyer made it very stressful for me. First, he came and took my case, everything about my story. After three days, I got a call on my phone from legal aid people who were demanding money. They said I had to give them money – and if I wanted to get out of detention then I would have to give £800, something like that. They said they were legal aid and they needed me to get this money to them, and this document this thing. They knew everything about me. I called my lawyer, but he never answers. You can call him the whole week but nothing, and no call back – everyone was complaining about that. You can only see him again when he had another appointment in Yarl's Wood. When I saw him again, the lawyer was pretending he knew nothing about it, but they knew every detail about me, every detail about my case. I was so stressed, I nearly died. I was so stressed, until one of the befrienders said that I should get a lawyer. Now I am with Wilsons, they are very good.

12. Some other things about detention:

13. They are supposed to separate people who are very unwell from the others, but sometimes they brought in people who were very mad. There were two: one older woman and one young lady, they weren't normal, they were very mad – they should separate from us, but they had them there with us all.

14. To me, sharing a room became a problem. In every room there were two people, but sometimes you need your privacy. I was too overstressed in that room. Because I snore, my roommates would bully me. Any time I complained to the officers that I want my own room, they did not listen. I went to them several times complaining that the person in my room was bullying me – but nothing, in every room there were always two people.

15. After I left the detention the stress was still there, but much less. When I was inside it was too much for my mind, I couldn't believe it – I cried all the time.

16. If I could tell anyone in power something, it would be this: the staff and nurses have to find a way to believe you when you complain. They have to listen to you and have to believe when you are suffering.