

Inquiry into the use of Immigration Detention

1. I would like to stay anonymous. I was in Yarl's Wood for four months and ten days. It was a very sad time. You feel different when you are in detention.
2. Some people claimed asylum in a normal manner and were sent to detention. I was sent there because my case was refused. When I claimed asylum, it was one week after my visa had expired – I was not fast tracked, but it played against me, because I did it later.
3. When I was sent to detention I didn't even have the same right as people who claimed asylum on time, I felt I was even beneath the others. Those people used to get a monthly report and for a long time I didn't get anything, so I didn't know what was going on with my case. Everything I presented during this time was rejected – I applied for judicial review and it was refused. I made a fresh claim and it was quickly refused, within two weeks.
4. I have history of depression and I'm still on tablets at the moment. Mentally I was not well even when I got there, but by the time I left I was feeling awful. They don't really take you seriously when you have depression in detention. The health care team are not really sympathetic to you.
5. When I started my hunger strike I was called to the health care centre to say why I was refusing food, and I couldn't give any reason. So they just left me alone. They just didn't care after that. I got really worried because I thought, 'I'm on hunger strike, and maybe one day I'll not wake up and people won't even know why I died'. That's when I chose to go back and tell the health care people that I was on hunger strike. That I was not happy with the way that things were going in detention – the fact that they were trying to put you on a plane so badly that they don't even take a look at your file properly.
6. Pastoral support is difficult. If you are a Christian, the pastor was very good, but if you are Muslim it was very difficult to speak to the Iman. Generally with Muslims, it is not really easy in detention. Sometimes I wanted to find some religious support, I would have liked to go to the local mosque and just find someone that I could talk to. But they want you to be Muslim in a certain way, to be ostentatious, to cover yourself from head to toe otherwise they don't believe you and don't make it easy for you to seek support.
7. You depend on the officers there for everything. When you want to send a fax to your solicitor, you depend on their help. Sometimes they are too lazy to help you – they look at you like they are too busy to get out of their chair and send a fax for you. If you want to go the library, the officers tell you that it is a privilege and not a right.

8. Sometimes when you the officers to help you, you feel like you have to seduce them, that's the thing you have to do to get some help. When I first went to detention, I did not have many clothes. I'm a small person and the other detainees are very big, so I didn't get underwear that I could wear. I only had one piece of underwear to wear – the others were too big. I had to ask some male officers for more, it was so embarrassing to go to a man. And even then, you have to beg them because they don't listen to you. It took me a month to get some new underwear that I could wear.
9. When a detainee receives a removal order, on that day the escorts come to pick up the person and take them to the airport. Sometimes, the detainee makes an appeal and succeeds in stopping the flight. They get the news from the solicitor and tell it to the escort, but the escorts still take the person to the airport, even when the removal directions have been stopped – they try their luck. If there is one thing I could change about removals it would be that – it's so stressful, you spend all day in the van. When you get to the airport the escorts try to get your travel documents from UKBA – but they can't because your removal has been stopped. Even though they are told that, you can't believe that they still take you to the airport – it is waste of time for everyone, and for you, it's so stressful, you feel like dying. To me, it feels like being on death row, and your execution day is set for one day – you hear it is postponed, but the guards will still insist to show you the execution chamber. If one thing could be changed on the removal process it would be that. It would be easy for the escort to call the home office and check whether you are able to fly or not. I've never been that scared the whole time in the UK as when that happened to me.
10. There was no support to deal with any mental, physical or emotional issues – not at all.
11. I do feel that there were longer-term impacts on me of detention. Whenever I go and report, I'm very tense – one time I had a panic attack at the reporting centre because I was so worried about going back to detention.
12. After I left whenever I went to report, I would take some underwear with me in case it would happen again and I would be in the same situation. I always did that, every time, until once one man went through my stuff at the reporting centre. It was horrible and I thought, that's it, I'm not going to do that again, so I don't carry it with me.