

Do you want your name to be made public? No, I wish to be anonymous.

Do you wish to give oral evidence before the inquiry panel? No

Are you making this submission by yourself or is someone helping you? If so, who is this person? Cathy, a visitor from Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group who visited me when I was in detention, is helping me complete the form.

Date you are completing this form 23/09/14

If you are no longer in detention and are currently living in the community...

When were you released from detention? How long were you in detention?

In which detention centres/prisons were you detained?

Oct-Nov 2010 Tinsley House and Dungavel; Oct 2012 – Feb 2013 Yarslwood;
Feb –April 2013 Dungavel

Can you tell us a little about why you were in detention?

I was first detained because I was in the UK with a student visa and I worked over the number of hours I was permitted to work. I had recently suffered a traumatic bereavement when my husband was killed and I was working as a carer in a care home to help me deal with my grief. I applied to extend my visa and was eventually given discretionary leave for three months but detained again when my visa still had two weeks left on it which expired when I was in detention. I claimed asylum as I no longer had status in the UK and I was afraid to return to my country as my late husband's family are threatening to forcibly marry me to my brother-in-law who is much older than me and already has three wives. Asylum was refused in 2012 and my appeal also refused. I lodged a fresh asylum claim in July 2014 as my late husband's family are still threatening me with enforced marriage.

Do you now have a right to remain in the UK? No, see above.

If you are still waiting to hear from the Home Office about their decision on your case, how long have you been waiting? Most recently, for two months since July 2014 but overall my status has been undecided since October 2010.

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

In Dungavel, the staff were friendly and treated us as human beings. You could request a separate room or share a room which was quite nice. You can go outside or fresh air and the food was good . In Yarslwood, everything was inside.

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

Access to a lawyer was a problem. In 2010 I couldn't see a lawyer in detention and had to do my Judicial Review myself. At Yarslwood, one legal firm dropped

my case as they said there was no merit so I went to court on my own with no legal advisers. I could not access my supporting paperwork as this was back in Scotland. It was an extremely stressful time. After that I put my name down to see a solicitor from another firm who were willing to help me but could not continue when I was detained in Scotland so I then had to switch solicitors to a Scottish legal aid firm who still represent me as long as I am in Scotland. It was easier to access legal help in Dungavel as solicitors come in every day.

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;

With no peace of mind, it is hard to eat and hard to sleep. Healthcare staff in detention centres do not believe you and don't take your problem seriously. They think you are pretending and just give you paracetamol. A woman at Yarslwood was very ill and suffering with diarrhoea. She was sent back before she had fully recovered and we heard that she died after she was returned. If you go to hospital, they treat you like a prisoner.

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

My difficulties have not been resolved. I still feel scared and don't sleep the night before I have to report every two weeks as part of my immigration bail conditions. I feel depressed but try to cope with this by keeping busy with volunteering for charity.

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

I am not saying the home office shouldn't detain people but not those with legal rights and severe danger to their lives. Opportunities should be given to enhance our human rights and be treated as individuals.

6) How far does the current detention system support the needs of vulnerable detainees, including pregnant women, detainees with a disability and young adults? Pregnant women are not detained in Scotland.

There was a lady who was mentally ill in one of the detention centres. The officers did not go into her room because of this so did not give her proper medication. It was obvious that she should not have been in detention as she could not be cared for properly.

7) There is currently no time limit on immigration detention – in your view what are the impacts (if any) of this? I think detention should be for no more than 3 months but this is not what happens. I met a woman in detention who had been detained for 2 years.

8) Are the current arrangements for authorizing detention appropriate?

They are not appropriate. When I was detained it was the first time I had worked over my 20 working hours limit (on a student visa) as I was suffering grief from my bereavement. Then I waited 2 years for a decision after that.

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

10) How effective are the current UK alternatives to detention (e.g. bail, reporting requirements)?

Bail is better than detention but there are problems, for example the voucher system for asylum seekers support sometimes does not work. There was an error on my voucher which meant I could not buy anything for three days. As there is no cash support I have to find someone who will swap the voucher when I need some cash.

Detention should not be for more than 3 months. When you are in detention, you should be listened to and treated with empathy and understanding. Home office and detention staff should be experienced, aware of our situation and informed of the facts. Detainees should be treated with dignity and not like trash as sometimes happens. When I recently went to sign I was asked 'What are you going to do if you are refused? Do you know you will have to go back?'. The officer did not show any empathy or understanding of my situation.