

Name : D from Africa, as told to Anna Pincus, Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group

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D asked not to have his name made public.

He would be prepared to give oral evidence if his name were not made public.

### Summary

1. History and health should be considered before people are detained.
2. Detention is not appropriate for vulnerable people as it can worsen their condition.
3. Detention causes practical problems for people and consideration should be given to their practical problems (loss of possessions and property).

### My experience of living in immigration detention

1. I was detained in July 2014 and granted bail yesterday. This was the second time I was detained and when I was detained before it was for twenty two months (on that occasion it was first detained for 6 months in Norwich prison after a 15 prison sentence and then in Colnbrook IRC). I was detained most recently in 2014 for failing to sign. I went to the police to report a crime because someone stole my mobile phone and I was picked up then and detained.
2. Recommendation : When I was picked up in 2014 they **didn't listen** to the fact that I didn't sign because I was ill and that was why I didn't report. I was suffering with paranoia and hallucinations. They didn't seem to understand that it had been found after my first detention that detention was unlawful because of my health (and because removal to the DRC wasn't imminent and because my refugee status was seized unlawfully with no notice and giving me false information). My **unlawful detention** case was settled in December 2013 but in July 2014 I was back in detention. I think that **when people are picked up and brought to detention their history and health should be considered**.

### The conditions in Immigration detention

3. It's stressful in detention. Being locked up is terrible. You have no dignity because staff disbelieve you and give you a hard time. Staff make statements about detainees judging them for their prison record. I was on the block for six weeks this last time in detention and it's like being in prison in detention. Healthcare come to you but they take their time. Then they tell you there's nothing wrong with you. You can't access the library from the block.

You have limited use of the gym. The security is harsh and being locked up is like mind torture when doors are slammed shut. You feel confused, frustrated and you feel no one cares and everyone's against you. Legal support depends on your solicitor. Some are just no good. Everyone is stressed. You hear people shouting and crying in the block. You hear people breaking up their cells. They ignore them. You hear people forcibly returned. It's scary. I think about how I'll feel if they do that to me. They come in white forensic suits with helmets and shields. It's not appropriate. The men are not animals.

4. Recommendation: I think there should be a **time limit** – even 3 or 6 months is better than what's happening now. I'm a vulnerable person because I had no parents and I grew up in a care home in South Africa where I suffered abuse. **I don't think detention is right for vulnerable people.**

Any long term impacts of detention on me in the wider community.

5. Other people see you like a 'low life' and you lose your friends. You feel shame being detained. I lost all my property. If I had come out of prison I would have got my belongings but because they detained me after I lost everything: my car, my clothes, my jewellery and my photos of friends. They were kept for a year from my house and then given away or tipped or sold, I don't even know what happened to them. They only had to keep them for a year. In detention my phone was taken away so I couldn't keep in contact with anyone. I had no numbers of friends to call.
6. Recommendation : If people weren't detained for so long they wouldn't lose their possessions and their connections with the outside world that make it harder for them to cope when they get out.

Whether there were appropriate mechanisms to deal with mental, physical or emotional issues

7. I'm 29 now and I've had mental health problems since the age of 17. In 2004 I was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and hallucinations and some post-traumatic stress. I had medication in the community and my condition was managed. In prison my condition worsened and stress led me to hear voices telling me to harm myself. I started to self-harm for the first time in prison and I took a paracetamol overdose (90 pills) on more than one occasion. I had to go to hospital for treatment. In spite of this history I was detained. They told me in detention I was 'just playing games'. The first time I was detained I tried to hang myself with a bed sheet in Colnbrook. I was on constant watch.
8. In Brook House this time I was detained it took ten days before I saw a psychiatrist. They gave me 5mg of medication. When outside, I was on 20mg orlazapine. The psychiatrist raised the level of my medication after I saw them and they recognised I had genuine mental health problems but for ten days after I arrived I was on the wrong level of medication. On 5mg I couldn't sleep and I had paranoid thoughts. I was getting messages from the TV and I tried to hang myself. They told me I was pretending.
9. Recommendation: My **history of self-harm** should have been considered when I was moved from prison to detention.

10. Recommendation: A **risk assessment of new detainees** relating to their health problems would have got me a psychiatric assessment quicker and I would have had the medication I needed without getting more ill. The stress of detention makes your mental health worse because you don't know what's happening. They should look at people's histories and if they have self-harm and suicide attempts previously they shouldn't detain them. Especially if they detain them and give dangerous levels of medication.