

- 1.1 I am a member of the Morton Hall Detention Visitor Group (MHDVG), a group of volunteers who visit people detained at Morton Hall (MH) and who oppose immigration detention. I have been visiting for approximately two years and have some awareness of detention through this. I also have some awareness of detention and its consequences through my work as a clinical psychologist, in a service that receives referrals for refugees and asylum seekers.
- 1.2 As a visitor, I have been concerned by the lack of basic facilities available to detainees, and by the fact that the Home Office does not appear to be following its own rules for detention. The most alarming failure is the detention (that I have witnessed) of people with untreated mental health problems, and of people who have been tortured, despite the clear rules stating that this should not happen.
- 1.3 MH's location means that communication by mobile telephone (the most freely available method for detainees) is difficult. Reception is bad at most times and places in MH. I have regularly struggled to communicate with detainees by telephone.
- 1.4 A further failure of basic provision is that access to interpretation services is inadequate. MH uses Language Line, a telephone-based system for interpretation. For legal and social visits, even Language Line has been unavailable, due to there being a single telephone in the visits hall, reserved for the use of the duty solicitor. It is difficult to believe that detainees are fully informed of their rights and duties when communication is so poor.
- 1.5 While MH have clearly made efforts to improve the conditions in which detainees are kept, a recurring problem has been the food provided. Inspections have also commented negatively that the food is unacceptable.
- 1.6 Two detainees have informed me that they had applied for voluntary return, but were still in detention some months later, because the Home Office had misplaced passports and other documents given into their custody. The lack of concern for the impact on people's lives that such failures have is staggering.
- 1.7 From my experience, detention does not support the needs of vulnerable people. I have seen people detained who have been tortured (without this being assessed by the Home Office) and others who have clear mental health needs that are not being met in detention. Until recently, I was not aware that Rule 35 challenges to detention could be made for such cases. I have been informed that such challenges are, in any case, seldom attended to.
- 1.8 For individuals, detention represents disbelief, loss of liberty, fear and uncertainty. Many express anger and resentment that this should happen to them in a country they had thought of as "free" and "just". Being disbelieved is also a risk factor for developing depressive and avoidant problems after release.
- 1.9 Detention separates individuals from their support networks. One detainee I visited told me that he had been supporting his English girlfriend financially, as she suffered with mental health difficulties. He expressed concern that she was unable to travel to visit him because of these problems. She would also have to begin claiming benefits as a result of his detention. Other detainees are separated from children and family. I have not witnessed the effects on those parties, but the loss of a parent or child will certainly be significant.
- 2.1 The lack of time limits for detention is a scandal and leaves the UK open to claims of unlawful detention. Staff at MH have spoken of people who are now so institutionalised as to not be seeking release, despite having a strong case to do so. Uncertainty is a major factor in the stress experienced by detainees, including those who have asked for voluntary return.

- 2.2 I find it shameful that indefinite detention is practised in the UK. The apparent “forgotten” nature of some of these cases is particularly galling. That detention occurs without apparent oversight is nothing short of criminal.
- 3.0 The current arrangements for authorising detention are inadequate. The clearest attestation to this is the Home Office’s own recent admission that it is unable to assess claims of torture, resulting in many people who have been tortured being detained, contrary to Home Office policy. The same applies to people with mental health problems – particularly as detainees may be unable to communicate problems to staff due to the lack of interpretation facilities.
- 4.0 The wider implications of immigration detention are many and disturbing. The dehumanisation and abuse of detainees has been seen from reports of sexual abuse of detainees by guards at Yarls Wood. This is not an isolated or unexpected outcome, but is a predictable consequence of treating human beings in a barbaric fashion by locking them up for not being British.
- 4.1 The culture of disbelief inherent within the asylum system traumatises those who experience it. I have treated torture victims who have been re-traumatised during their interviews and by being disbelieved (as they perceived it at the time). Such experiences create fear by themselves. Combined with detention, they recreate experiences of unlawful and abusive detention that many have experienced in their countries of origin. In my view, this makes the state complicit in torture. For those people who are granted refugee status, the process of rebuilding their lives is made infinitely more difficult.
- 4.2 The view of the UK as a fair country, in which there is genuine rule of law has been greatly damaged by the practice of immigration detention. Detainees I have visited complain bitterly that the UK’s claims of fairness are hollow.
- 4.3 The perception that the lives of people who are from outside Europe or the English-speaking countries are valued less by the British state than those from within those areas is strengthened by the asylum system’s clear bias towards rejecting claims (including the incentives given to Home Office staff and sub-contractors for doing so). This has been at the heart of some of the issues of “radicalisation” seen in communities where people feel that this is the case.
- 5.0 The effectiveness of bail reporting is compromised by two issues. The first is the regular practice of detaining people at reporting centres. By definition, this means that those who are compliant with bail are those who are detained. The second issue is the lack of local facilities for reporting. Asylum seekers in the East Midlands have to make expensive and time-consuming journeys to Loughborough every week. This is a burden on people who are often struggling financially and psychologically. Bail would otherwise be a suitable alternative for the majority of people in detention.
- 5.1 The safe-keeping of travel documents would also be an alternative to detention were it not for evidence that the Home Office struggles to keep documents safely.
- 5.2 Many of those whom I have spoken to in detention appear to have been detained not for good reasons, but through bureaucracy. This appears to be the worst kind of unfair treatment given to those who are least able to defend themselves.

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