

Charity no. 1120185

Patron: Professor John Fitzpatrick OBE

Kent Law Clinic

Annual Report 2015 – 16

Kent Refugee Help is a small, user-led charity working for the release and support of migrants who were detained in Dover Immigration Removal Centre (DIRC), and detainees held in Kent and London prisons. We believe that indefinite detention of any person for administrative purposes is discriminatory and unjust, and should be challenged. We seek to obtain the release of detained persons through casework with individuals and by supporting bail applications. KRH offers continuing support to former detainees and their families following their release into the community.

During the year 2015 – 2016 KRH has continued direct case-work with detainees and former detainees, including financial support for educational and vocational qualifications. We have continued our work, begun in 2014/15, with foreign nationals held in Kent and London prisons prior to deportation. Following the closure of the DIRC in October, 2015, we plan to extend our work with foreign national detainees in prisons.



Rally in Margate, Autumn 2015



KRH Volunteers and Casework Support

Trustees: Lyn Innes, Bahriye Kemal, Ewen Macmillan, Chris Perks, Sue Powell (Chair)

Caseworkers: Kate Adams, Pete Keenan

Administrative Support: Lesley Grove of Accuracy Accounts and Alexia Padgam of Your VA

Website: Nancy Roth

Volunteers: Hakki Aganoglu, Matthew Bodycombe, Raga Gibreel, Mehiri Holliday

Also essential support from Sureties, as well as present and former detainees.

The sudden and unexpected government announcement on 15 October last year to close the DIRC created high levels of anxiety and apprehension for our detained clients. In the space of 13 days, 291 men were dispersed to other removals centres in the UK. The staff, with whom we had established a good working relationship, were re-assigned to other prisons. This has been a watershed moment for KRH. Casework for men detained in Dover had been our core work since we began, our reason for becoming a charity.

In December the Trustees, caseworkers and close supporters held a meeting to discuss the way forward. The consensus was that KRH should continue its work in prisons and maintain its campaigning role in opposing immigration detention and the increasingly hostile environment the government is creating for asylum seekers. Our role in training would continue to be significant for providing an understanding of new immigration laws, their impact, and resources for assisting detainees and ex-detainees.

Before and after the closure of the DIRC, KRH has continued to work closely with the Kent Law Clinic, Samphire (formerly the Dover Detainees Visitors' Group), Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID), and Detention Forum. We have organised information and training sessions, recruited and trained volunteers, and recruited and supported sureties.

Finance and Funding

Funding from the Yapp Trust and Henry Smith Fund and has now been expended. These funds supported the casework post relating to men held in Dover Immigration Removal Centre, and post-release support. With the closure of the DIRC last autumn, this post has now been terminated. We are

deeply grateful to these charities for their crucial or support in maintaining our core work over the years.

Meanwhile our work with men detained in prisons in London and Kent has continued to expand. We obtained a second one-year grant from **Awards for All** to support the casework, travel and other associated costs. A grant from the **Arm Trust** enabled us to maintain this work during an interim funding period.

We also received a grant from the **Eleanor Rathbone Trust**, closely associated with Liverpool, to help travel costs there for those submitting a fresh claim for asylum, which must now be done in person.

A further grant from the **Huguenot Trust** enables us to assist with emergency payments for travel and subsistence. We are also grateful for a further donation from **Garden Court** special fund.

The refugee crisis, as well as some recent high profile KRH cases, has led to a very generous increase in donations to our unrestricted funds and the **Eddie Barns Memorial Fund** from individuals and church groups. This generosity is proof that many desire to see more positive action to welcome and support refugees in the UK.

We will need to apply for further financial support which will allow us to continue and expand our work with foreign nationals detained in prisons.

KRH Annual Caseworker Report April 2015 - March 2016

| <u>Casework statistics</u> | <u>2015-16</u> | <u>2014-15</u> |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Total number of Referrals: | 34 | (73) |
| Total men Released with our help: | 13 | (20) |
| Released with Surety: | 9 | (13) |
| Released no surety allocated: | 2 | (1) |
| Released Temporary Admission: | 2 | (6) |
| Released voluntary return: | 0 | (0) |
| Removed against will: | 5 | (4) |
| Granted leave to remain with our help: | 5 | (5) |
| Unlawful Detention Compensation award: | 0 | (1) |
| Returned to UK - Visa Granted | 1 | |
| Married! | 1 | |

This year has seen some dramatic changes in Dover; on October 14th I was contacted by the Welfare Manager at the DIRC, who told me that in two weeks time the centre would be closing and emptied of those detained. To the day this was precisely what happened. Under other circumstances, this

would have been something to celebrate. However the vast majority of detainee's were sent on to other 'for profit' run Immigration Removal Centres. Dover was one of the few remaining HM Prison run centres.

Just six weeks previously large numbers of those detained in Dover had been peremptorily shipped out to other centres, to make way for an increase in numbers of men arriving from Calais. In the month of August and early September Dover was being used as a short term 'holding' facility with very rapid turnover.

These moves in August, September and October seriously compromised support for detainees from both KRH and Samphire, as well as solicitor links and highly valuable surety connections. Such issues did not sway the Home Office. Once again we were confronted with the absence of humanitarian concerns for those many fleeing persecution and suffering, interned for indeterminate periods of time by the UK.

On this last area of concern, KRH worked closely with the Detention Forum, which lobbied members of parliament in relation to establishing a finite, proposed maximum detention time of 28 days, and drew parliament's attention to the UK's parlous record on indefinite Immigration detention.

We have been involved locally in attempting to communicate the reality of the refugee's plight, in the face of repeat visits by far right groups and their hate-filled bigotry.

Although new direct referrals are down on last year as a result of the DIRC closure, we continue to work with our former detained clients and friends, tackling the complex and punitive conditions of release. We have

also become aware of the plight of EEA who in some cases have fewer rights than those with refugee and asylum rights. For example, EEA Nationals released from prison after conviction or on bail have no entitlement to S4 accommodation, and we found several who were homeless.

Amongst the many individuals that we do our best to support, there are those who offer considerable help to fellow inmates, looking past their own plight, often including years of incarceration, in order to assist with interpretation,



Gregors, his back to the DIRC

advice, and mentoring. One such was a Polish national, Gregors, who strove to help other Polish detainees and ex-detainees and referred them to us for assistance.

There have been too many cases where despite all our efforts, detainees have been deported or failed to get bail. However, every now and then and down to sheer dogged commitment from all in the chain, a positive result is achieved when hope has seemed lost. One such case was our friend Saied last summer, who had been removed from the UK under Dublin 3 Regulations, to an internment camp in Europe. After many set-backs, he was finally granted a visa so that he could join his wife in Wales. He emailed:

'Time is 2:09 AM in Italy I can't sleep I been pray I said to my dear GOD I'm grateful about everything after 21 months god give my visa and I'm so so happy about that and I can't wait to see my wife and my family. In all this time I had sad time and happy time as well but my soul (Wife) was with me all the time ,and my dear mom (Surety) when we was upset or when we had problem she was with us-- now I want to tell my dear mom (Surety) we are so so grateful forever and also we are thankful of my kind solicitor and dear (KRH).'

My message to Saeid's solicitor, Simran, in Cardiff thanked her profusely for her great work: *'Brilliant News, Saied is back in Cardiff in time for imminent arrival of small party (new Baby!) PK.*

She replied: *Very good news indeed!!! I am so happy for my extended family. And thanks to you as well for keeping me motivated and encouraging me with your kind words.'*

Simran's term 'extended family' sums up the ideal communication and support chain which constitutes KRH's work



Saeid G with baby daughter Seren

Kent Refugee Help Prison Project

Our Prison project is in its second year. We provide support to refugees, asylum seekers and migrants defined and detained as foreign national prisoners in Kent and London. Referrals have come from Rochester, Elmley and Pentonville Prison where we run a two monthly workshop. Our project is staffed entirely by part- time sessional workers.

This year we have met with 74 new prisoners and worked intensively with 20 cases, 6 of which were existing clients. We have seen prisoners from Albania, Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, the Congo, Columbia, Northern Cyprus, Ethiopia, France, Ghana, Guinea, Iran, Iranian and Turkish Kurdistan, Ireland, Jamaica, Lithuania, Morocco, Nigeria, Romania, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Syria, Sudan and Tanzania.

The Government's strategy of blaming immigrants and creating a hostile environment strips them of legal rights and resources. Prisoners face removal to countries they left as child migrants with their families; relationships with partners and children are severed as there is no legal aid to fight deportation on the basis of family life. A new Immigration Act has dismantled the entitlement to a bail address for those held indefinitely for deportation. Even for those still eligible under the old rules there are long delays leading to deep despair and sometimes mental breakdown as without an address they are unable to apply for bail and challenge their detention. We have raised these issues via a protest and a meeting with our MP at his surgery.

The high profile cases of 3 refugees who walked the length of the Euro Tunnel attracted much publicity, not all positive. The three men, having escaped violence and persecution in Sudan and Iran, were shocked and traumatised to find themselves in prison, facing criminal charges. KRH visited them in prison and organised public support at the various hearings at Canterbury Crown Court. Our support is ongoing.

In the Pentonville workshops prisoners have presented us with a range of problems, needing assistance in contacting their families, solicitors and former employers and advocacy on matters relating to their health care. We have accompanied them to see the in- house immigration team and have made referrals for legal representation that has become increasingly difficult to access due to the cuts. The charity Bail for Immigration Detainees (Bid) whose ADAP project took cases for legal assistance with deportation matters is now oversubscribed. We continue to refer cases to Bid for bail. Requesting

clients' data from the Home Office is essential to follow up as prisoners frequently lose documents due to their fractured and chaotic lives. Listening with empathy is also crucial to the work. We recently spent time with a young Syrian man unable to stop crying because he had lost contact with his mother and sister in Aleppo since being in prison. In Elmley and Rochester we have met refugees who came here as unaccompanied children and have strong protection claims but none the less are threatened with deportation.

The extraordinary pressures experienced by foreign prisoners, demands both an individual casework and a broader political response to raise awareness and call for change. We continue to work with them on both counts.

Four people have been released on bail and one on temporary admission. Two people were granted asylum and another returned voluntarily to his country within the course of our work. We have recruited a volunteer for visiting and befriending and hope to expand this.



Stop the cuts demonstration, September 2015.

Events

Refugees welcomed

In October 2015 Kent Refugee Help held a joint stall with the Whitstable Stop the Cuts group to welcome refugees. This was in response to activities from far right groups who were attempting to whip up racial and religious hatred towards unaccompanied asylum seeking children who were being placed temporarily in Whitstable. This placement coincided with the huge influx of refugees fleeing war and poverty to Europe which has triggered fear and resentment in some but has also elicited enormous compassion resulting in support groups springing up across the UK who are fund raising for refugees stranded in Greece, Italy and Calais. One of these is Whitstable Calais Solidarity who have raised thousands of pounds through various initiatives. Our leaflet stated, "People who object to refugees are worried about jobs, housing and wages being cut. But it's austerity not refugees that threatens access to good housing, jobs and higher wages. Let's maintain Britain's caring tradition towards refugees and let them in".

"Working Illegally"

Kent Refugee Help showed "Working illegally" at Whitstable Labour Club, a documentary by Standoff Films which highlights the oppression of immigration detainees paid £1 an hour for essential labour such as cooking, hairdressing and cleaning when they should be paid a living wage. Outside the detention system they are banned from working because of their lack of immigration status and this is against the TUC's policy. A panel for Q and A consisted of Kate Adams, Lucy Williams, and Joe, a former detainee.

Training

In November 2015 Richard Warren, solicitor at the Kent Law Clinic provided us with training on the Immigration Bill 2015, now an Act of parliament. The new legislation reinforces a hostile climate towards migrants by imposing a 5 year prison sentence on people caught working illegally and their employers. Landlords must now make immigration checks on potential tenants, changes to asylum support will make many destitute including asylum seeking families and their children and those who accessed housing including bail addresses through "Section 4" support now to be disbanded.

Chris Bird

London artist Chris Bird, who is “happy and delighted to support Kent Refugee Help,” has generously donated his original artwork as designs for a midwinter season’s greeting card and a postcard for Refugee week. The greetings cards were distributed to prisoners in HMP Pentonville at the December workshop who were pleased to have cards to send to friends and family. A series of Chris’s original hand drawn postcards will be auctioned at the AGM.

**Pete Keenan**

As a result of the recent closure of the DIRC, Pete Keenan’s work with KRH has come to an end. He took on the Dover casework post in early 2011. In his five years in the post he brought to it his unique enthusiasm and determination in supporting asylum seekers and refugees. He has represented KRH at Detention Forum in its campaign to end indefinite detention. His ability to make personal connections with all his clients is matched by his generosity in taking people into his own home until their cases are resolved. KRH and his many clients are much in his debt.

Looking forward

As we begin another year's work toward a better-informed public awareness of the issues surrounding refugees and asylum seekers, we want to express our gratitude to the volunteers and friends who help in a myriad of ways. We depend on them. We intend to continue (and with sufficient funding, extend) our work with foreign national prisoners in Kent and London prisons. We expect challenges. The recent Immigration Act has reinforced the 'climate of hostility' promoted by the government, and with yet more cuts in legal aid and welfare provision, along with the increasingly toxic language around immigration the task of supporting refugees and asylum seekers has become even more difficult, and even more urgently needed.



London March to Welcome Refugees, March 19, 2016