

Scottish Detainee Visitors is now coming in to its 3rd year visiting asylum and immigration detainees held in Dungavel Immigration Removal Centre. This year we have welcomed ?? new volunteers to SDV, who have visited a wide range of people from throughout the world. Of the people SDV volunteers visited, some have sadly been returned to the violence and persecution which they fled, a few have been released and many remain in the uncertainty and isolation of Dungavel. SDV volunteers have worked to support people in Dungavel who have limited support and resources in extremely distressing circumstances.

In 2004, awareness of Dungavel in Scotland has increased, with a number of media reports and high profile cases. SDV has seen an increase in other groups and individuals visiting as a clear indicator that many Scottish people do want to assist people in Dungavel and many people in Dungavel have commented on the kindness they feel characterises Scottish people. SDV has worked this year on building and developing links with other groups and individuals with an interest in the welfare of the people held in Dungavel. The co-operation and generosity of other organisations and individuals has allowed SDV to continue to support detainees.

By the time of this year's AGM, SDV will have welcomed our new co-ordinator, Kate Alexander and said goodbye to David Polfreman. David has worked with SDV, first as a volunteer and latterly as co-ordinator, since 199? and we wish him well in his future endeavours and hope that he will continue his involvement with SDV.

SDV would like to thank everyone who has assisted us throughout the year by donating their time, money, spare clothing and even living rooms. We would like to thank the Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland for their generous grant and it is important to recognise that none of this would have been possible without the considerable support given to us by Scottish Refugee Council. SDV volunteers have also raised a sizeable proportion of our funding through sponsored events and innovative fundraising and we hope to plan further events in 2005.

Structure

SDV is a volunteer organisation. There are currently 21 trained volunteers who regularly visit Dungavel and a number of additional volunteers who support SDV in assisting with fundraising and other activities.

As a registered charity, SDV is run by a Management Committee which has overall responsibility for the work of the organisation.

SDV employs a part-time co-ordinator to oversee the day-to-day activities.

Visits and Support for Detainees

SDV's main aim is to alleviate feelings of isolation and disempowerment for people detained in Dungavel by visiting and offering support. Since being constituted in late October 2002, SDV have visited Dungavel twice weekly, visiting an average of ?? detainees on every visit, with a total of ?? visits made by the end of 2004.

Information gathered from each visit is recorded in order to establish a clear picture of the situation in Dungavel and to aid continuity in visits. SDV have developed our recording system to reflect concerns about people held in detention. In line with widespread recognition of the impact of gender on a detainee's support needs, SDV collates information specifically about the needs of women in detention. We share all relevant information with UK visiting groups and partner refugee organisations to assist their work in improving conditions for detainees.

During 2004, SDV volunteers supported detainees from ?? different countries of whom ??% were from ?? and ??% were from ??...

Detainees were supported, on average, for ?? months. ??% of detainees we have visited were supported for more than 6 months. In our experience, people detained for long periods of time are particularly in need of support as they are more susceptible to depression and despondency with their situation.

Of the detainees visited, ??% were female and ??% male. Throughout 2004 fewer families were detained in Dungavel and as a result of this, SDV volunteers have supported fewer families this year with ???

The practical support we have provided reflects the needs of detainees. Whilst being detained, people in Dungavel suffer from physical isolation from their families and other support networks and from legal advisers.

- We have provided phone-cards to allow detainees to maintain contact with family members, both in the UK and elsewhere.
- Volunteers contact legal advisers on behalf of detainees, where appropriate.
- Volunteers have located and returned personal possessions to detainees who did not have the chance to bring them to Dungavel because they were detained without notice.
- We have provided emergency money to destitute detainees who are about to be removed, in order to allow them to reach a safe place in the country they are removed to.
- SDV has received donations of clothing and toiletries which have been given to detainees as and when required.

Information for Detainees

One of our plans at the start of the year was the need to improve our knowledge in order to work with detainees. An area which we identified was that of bail. A bail sub-group was formed which worked to gather information about the bail procedure and to consider what role SDV could take in helping detainees who wanted more information about, or wished to apply for, bail. We held a bail workshop on 16 October where a group of volunteers discussed the bail application system and SDV's role. Following on from the workshop we have set up a group of 'bail visitors' who hope to be able to provide specific help and contact for those detainees in Dungavel around the issue of bail.

In addition to support with the bail process, SDV regularly provides information to detainees, such as:

- lists of qualified legal advisers in Scotland
- contact details for other relevant organisations
- orientation information for detainees being deported to other EU countries

Website

In 2004, SDV subscribed to workwithus.org in order to develop a website for the organisation. This has been a valuable asset, particularly due to the limited staff time SDV has available, and has provided a contact point for the organisation, providing information on what we do and how people can support us.

Volunteers

SDV volunteers have a variety of different backgrounds and life experiences, this helps when supporting people from similarly diverse origins. Language skills are particularly useful with volunteers speaking 12 languages apart from English. We have a team of 21 volunteers, visiting Dungavel on a rota system. SDV pays out of pocket expenses incurred by volunteers.

New volunteers attend initial induction and a 2-day training course on visiting skills and issues relating to asylum and detention. Volunteers are also offered the opportunity to attend specific training as required. New volunteers are supported by more experienced volunteers through a system of 'buddying'. Every 6 weeks support meetings are run for all volunteers; this is an opportunity for everyone to share information and concerns with the whole group. Volunteers have also represented SDV at national events such as AVID conferences.

Challenges

Dungavel is a difficult place to get to. As such, in order to carry out visits, SDV relies on volunteers using their own cars to travel to Dungavel. This would not be possible unless we could reimburse drivers. SDV is currently funded to August 2006 and aside from visiting, one of our key areas of work in 2005 will be identifying further funding opportunities.

Despite time constraints regarding distance to Dungavel, SDV continue to liaise regularly with Premier Detention Services staff and management. This allows us to maintain a positive working relationship with staff and assists us in continuing to visit and support detainees in Dungavel. Recent alterations in visit policy have restricted the numbers of detainees individual visitors can see and we will continue to work to maximise the support that we can give within these boundaries.

We are aware that there are people detained in Dungavel who would benefit from a visit, but who do not know about the service provided by SDV. We make every effort to ensure that all detainees are aware of our visits. Detainees frequently hear about SDV through word of mouth, with those we have already visited often encouraging others to come with them to following visits. In this way we are able to support more detainees.

In an effort to reach all detainees, we have endeavoured to provide information about SDV in Dungavel's Detainee Induction Pack and on multi-language posters put up within the Centre. We have also produced a leaflet which explains to detainees what we do, this has been translated in to several languages and we intend to extend the variety of languages available in future.

Future Plans

SDV will continue to identify areas where we need to improve our knowledge in order to work with detainees. This will be carried out by maintaining and developing links with other organisations and by offering training to volunteers as required.

The Home Office increased the capacity of Dungavel by 44 in 2004, bringing total capacity to 192. In view of this, SDV plan to develop our skills and resources. This will include recruiting new volunteers as required, always aiming to maintain a diverse volunteer group with a wide range of language skills.

We recognise that the most important thing that SDV can offer to detainees is friendship and someone to talk to, with this in mind we look forward to the rest of 2005.