

Welcome to the first annual report of Scottish Detainee Visitors (SDV).

Originally run as a volunteer project through the Scottish Refugee Council, SDV constituted as an independent charity in October 2002. Since this time, volunteers from SDV have visited immigration and asylum detainees in Dungavel Removal Centre at least twice a week, to provide social, emotional and practical support to the people detained there. As an organisation, SDV is part of a wider network of support for immigration and asylum detainees. SDV works with local and national organisations, including the Association of Visitors to Immigration Detainees (AVID), to disseminate information and raise awareness amongst organisations which in turn inform government policy on issues relating to detention.

In Scotland, people subject to asylum and immigration law can be detained arbitrarily and without limit of time. We have visited people who have been detained on entry to the UK and have no idea where they are or why. Other people who have been visited by SDV volunteers have already established lives in the UK which have been torn apart by their detention. Having committed no crime, detainees in Dungavel are particularly vulnerable and isolated members of society, often being in fear for their life and the lives of their families were they to be returned to their country of origin. Our volunteers find it hard to imagine how difficult it must be for detainees to function day-to-day in this environment.

According to Her Majesty's Inspector of Prisons Inspection of Immigration Custodial Estates (April 2003), the majority of immigration detainees feel insecure in detention. Detention is frequently an isolating, frightening and frustrating experience, which can compound the trauma of those that may have been victims of torture or other human rights abuses. Detainees' insecurity is compounded by the serious difficulty they have in gaining access to legal and other information relating to their case.

SDV exists to alleviate some of this isolation and provide a link for people to the outside world. To do this, SDV relies on the skills and experiences of the volunteers and with each new volunteer we acquire a valuable resource.

“When I hear my name being called - to receive a visitor - it is a cause for celebration!

Peter, African detainee in Dungavel”

For many of the members of SDV it has been a year not only of visiting, but also of participating in a variety of aspects of the organisation. Whether it be getting up early on a Saturday morning to pick up refreshments for a 5-a-side football fundraiser or staying up late to finalise the details on the constitution, many of the volunteers involved have put in a lot of extra time and effort to enable the organisation to run effectively.

Special mention should also be made of the two people who have held the post of co-ordinator in the past 15 months. Both David Polfreman and Rachel Simpson have put in more time and energy than most of us thought possible and then just a little bit more in order to make sure that visits run well and the volunteers are fully supported. It is through their dedication, the support of the management committee and the hard work of all of the volunteers that SDV has had such a successful first year.

SDV would like to thank everyone who has assisted us throughout the year by donating their time, money, spare clothing and even living rooms. In particular we would like to thank Oxfam and the Lloyds TSB Foundation for Scotland for their generous grants. 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 volunteer, Rana Judge, being interviewed at Glasgow Eid Mela 2003

“
Вы меня очень помогли,
поддерживали всегда.
Хорошо, что мы могли
говорить по русский. Я
считаю что это все через вас.
Очень большое спасибо!

You helped me such a lot, you always
supported me. It was great that we could
speak Russian together. I think that everything
[leaving Dungavel] has happened is because of
you. Thank you so much!

Russian female detainee **”**

In the coming year, and for as long as there are immigration and asylum detainees, SDV will continue to provide emotional and practical support to those detained in Scotland.

Catriona Gibson
SDV Chair

Scottish Detainee Visitors
c/o SRC
5 Cadogan Square
170 Blythswood Court
Glasgow G2 7PH

Structure

SDV is a volunteer organisation. There are currently 25 trained volunteers who regularly visit Dungavel.

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.

“ Me daba la oportunidad de compartir con algien las cosas que me preocupaba, la oportunidad de llorar si me hacia falta. Les agradezco.

It gave me the opportunity to share the things that worried me, to cry if I needed to. I thank them.

Ecuadorian female, 5 months in detention ”

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 6 detainees on every visit, with a total of 115 visits made by the end of 2003.

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.

Since May 2003 SDV volunteers have supported detainees from 36 different countries of whom 37% were from Sub-Saharan Africa and 28% from Russia and the ex-Soviet republics.

“ Through visiting I have met some very special and courageous people - the experience has made me more aware of, and keen to increasingly question, the society in which I live and our attitudes to refugees and migrants.

SDV volunteer ”

Detainees were supported, on average, for 2 months. Significantly, 10% 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.

“ Each time I visit Dungavel, or talk to detainees on the phone, I am amazed at the fortitude and determination of people who are detained without having committed a criminal act and with no date of release. I feel enormous admiration for those we visit.

SDV volunteer ”

Of the detainees visited, 38% were female and 62% male. Almost a third of the people visited were being detained as families. Families visited have included up to three generations with grandparents and children from newborn babies to 17 year olds.

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.

“ It's good to talk to the visitors, especially when I am so far away from my family.

South African female, 2 months in Dungavel ”

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
- information on the bail process

At the request of the local health authority, SDV volunteers have visited and provided support for immigration and asylum detainees whilst receiving treatment in both Hartwoodhill Hospital and the State Hospital, Carstairs.

“ I like the visits because it means I can talk to someone and share my feelings with someone. It makes me feel happy and I realise I am not alone. They give us helpful practical advice. I think they should bring more people so that they can visit everyone. ”

Detainee in Dungavel.

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 14 languages apart from English. We have a full team of 25 volunteers, visiting Dungavel on a rota system. SDV pays out of pocket expenses incurred by volunteers.

“ I went to Dungavel for the first time last week, the whole group was really supportive and gave me the confidence I needed to talk to detainees. ”

SDV volunteer

“ I love volunteering with SDV, it's a really rewarding and humbling experience, at times I feel I gain more from the visit than I give as I learn so much from the people we visit. ”

SDV volunteer

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.

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.

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, we intend to have this translated in to several languages shortly.

“**Dear Scottish Detainee Visitors,**

Female detainees are happy to see you visitors coming in detention to visit them. Helping them in what you can do for them. We need visitors, normally it is good because it makes us happy sometimes. And helping us to forget some problems we have at that time. Thank you for your help and for coming to visit us in Dungavel. God bless you.

”
Female Wing

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 will increase the capacity of Dungavel by 44 in Spring 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 2004.

“**Thank you for caring about us**”

Chinese female, 18, 3 months in Dungavel

Financial Accounts from 1st January – 31st December 2003

		Actual £
Income		
Fundraising income		
STAR / Eid Mela / individual donations	177	700.00
Churches Together: Larkhall donations	305	
Five-a-side Football Event	218	
Grants		
Oxfam (Received 01.08.03)	6,000	11,940.00
Lloyds TSB (Received 18.08.03)	5,940	
Bank Interest		13.41
Total Income		12,653.41
Expenditure		
Visiting expenses		438.07
Meeting expenses		43.75
Wages and payroll costs (09.03 – 12.03)		1,832.55
Public & Employer's Liability Insurance		185.54
Miscellaneous		40.00
Total Expenditure		2,539.91
Balance as of 31.12.03:		£10,113.50

Note to the Accounts:

For the period 1 January – 31 March 2003, Scottish Detainee Visitors (SDV) was directly supported by the Scottish Refugee Council (SRC), who were in receipt of a grant from Oxfam for that purpose. All monies, both income and expenditure, were managed by the SRC and processed through their accounts.

For the period 1 April – August 2003, SDV operated on a minimal budget largely relying on donations in kind and goodwill from our members.

The grant income shown above is for a 12 month period, both grants commencing in August 2003. Hence the expenditure shown was largely incurred in the final third of 2003, in line with our expected annual budget.

Throughout the year the SRC has offered support in kind in the form of office accommodation, administration, direct support and computer access.

Financial Accounts from 9th October – 31st December 2002

	Actual £
Income	00.00
Total Income	00.00
Expenditure	00.00
Total Expenditure	00.00
Balance as of 31.12.02:	£00.00

Note to the Accounts:

For the period of these accounts (October 2002 – December 2002) SDV was directly supported by the Scottish Refugee Council (SRC), who were in receipt of a grant from Oxfam for that purpose. All monies, both income and expenditure, were managed by the SRC and processed through their accounts. The SRC also offered support in kind in the form of office accommodation, administration, direct support and computer access.

Other Organisations

Association of Visitors to Immigration Detainees (AVID)

P.O Box 7, Oxted, Surrey, RH8 0YT
www.aviddetention.org.uk

Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID)

London office : 020 7247 3590
(1.30 to 4.30 p.m. Monday to Friday)
www.biduk.org

The Bail Circle

28 Commercial Street, London, E1 6LS
020 7377 9356
open-sesame@lineone.net

British Red Cross

Glasgow and Renfrewshire Branch
2 Swan Street, Glasgow, G4 0AX
0141 332 1607
www.redcross.org.uk

Immigration Advisory Service (IAS)

glasgow@iasuk.org
www.iasuk.org

National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC)

North East England and Scotland
NCADC, Stockton International Family
Centre, 66 Dovecote Street, Stockton on
Tees TS18 1LL
01642 679 298
ncadc-north-east@ncadc.org.uk

Scottish Refugee Council

5 Cadogan Square, (170 Blythswood
Court), Glasgow, G2 7PH
0141 248 9799
www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk