

GATWICK DETAINEES WELFARE GROUP



GDWG at 25

As the UK moves out of the European Union, we face many uncertainties, yet we experience certainty in the power of our human connections embodied by GDWG and Refugee Tales. In our birthday year, our community is stronger than ever. Our visitors are making profound connections with those who are detained and walk alongside them in life after detention. In this newsletter we share news of what our birthday means to us, artistic responses to our work, updates on our school talks, our July walk, our research, and we celebrate 25 years of our visitors supporting people in detention. Thank you for your support in our birthday year.

Anna Pincus
Director, GDWG

February 2020

GDWG partner with Warwick University and the Central England Law Centre

By Karris Hamilton

We have partnered with Warwick University and the Central England Law Centre for an exciting new project looking at healthcare in detention. The Strategic Public Law Clinic is partnering with several different charities to give students with a strong interest in human rights issues the opportunity to learn how to use the law to challenge systemic issues within public services. Eighty law students in Warwick Law School applied to be part of the project. Only eight were selected after demonstrating their commitment and intentions to work in the fields of public law and immigration.

Our project is focusing on the quality of healthcare within detention centres with a particular focus on the equivalence of healthcare in detention to services within the community. As many of you will know, we constantly get reports from people about problems they have experienced with healthcare. Issues such as; people not getting their medication for days/weeks or not at all, external hospital appointments being missed or delayed, emergency services not being called when they are needed, people with severe mental health issues or those who lack capacity not being identified and people's health concerns not being taken seriously, etc.

The Strategic Public Law Clinic will be looking into these issues and collecting evidence in the form of research and possibly interviews. This will allow us to feed into ongoing processes around the

recommissioning of healthcare services in detention, present to senior officials at the Home Office and work for change.

Karris is working on the project alongside Karen Ashton, Central England Law Centre and Tara Mulqueen, Professor at Warwick Law School. If you'd like to hear more about the project, you can get in touch with Karris: karris@gdwg.org.uk, 01293 657070.



What the GDWG 25th anniversary means to me

By Jamie Macpherson (GDWG visitor & trustee)

When Anna asked me to write a piece on what our 25th anniversary meant to me I had very mixed emotions. Sadness at the thousands of men who have passed through Brook House & Tinsley in 25 years. The stolen time, the separated families, the lost hope and opportunities, and the wasted money spent on detention that could be put to better use. I then reflected on the number of people that we have supported during that time. How, thanks to the staff and volunteers at GDWG, we have given help, both emotional and practical.

Visiting is the reason we exist; I have visited people who are in detention for the last 8 years. In addition, I have been a trustee for the last 4 years and have enjoyed the opportunity to work closely with staff and fellow trustees in helping to shape the future of GDWG.

Visiting has broadened my knowledge of different cultures and the world. Meeting people from different countries, cultures and backgrounds. I have made friends with people that I wouldn't normally have met during my day to day life.

I consider myself a non-religious person and have often been asked during visits if I have a faith. Yes, I reply, I have faith in people! This has been confirmed by the people I visit. What has always astounded me is that many of these people have suffered greatly in their lives but are still full of empathy and kindness. I am surprised that they show such interest in

me and my life - visiting is very much a two-way experience and the friendships that you make can last for years.

Visiting is not without its pain and difficulties. The weekly experience of Brook House - signing in, body searches and many locked doors to pass through can be a trial. The sadness of losing friends through deportation. Listening to peoples' stories and circumstances can be hard but we have a great support network for visitors with local support groups and an experienced and caring office team.

I have had many happy times as well. Such as the 14 months I visited my Somaliland friend with his jokes and humour, even during really hard times. We spent three months speaking to each other through a glass screen in the 'closed visits' room but still his humour shone through and he always asked about me and my family. I am still in regular contact with him since he returned to Somaliland and we share photos of marriages, children and grandchildren. I feel privileged that he considers me his friend and still wants to share his life with me.

One of the great adventures of GDWG in recent years is the Refugee Tales project and 'Walk with Us'. Spending time in the open air, talking, laughing and enjoying life with people, many of whom we have visited in detention, is the most uplifting and positive experience. My hope for the future and GDWG is that detention will end and that our current reason for existing will no longer be needed. Then we can all move forward to helping and supporting people in a life beyond detention.

Sculpture

by Patsy Hickman

I think everyone knows that great writers are not great writers simply because they write good stories. They do indeed write good stories but they also, amongst their other intentions, say important things in a way that can become part of our everyday language.

I took my grandchildren to *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* before Christmas. The professor who shelters the children during the Blitz of World War Two says these words which have stuck in my mind: "The mind is like a parachute: it only works if it is opened." It was at late in life university that my parachute was opened. Not that reading Susan Sontag had not had an effect on me. Her writings were an accessible, intellectual life-line, during child rearing, during domesticity. "Be serious," she said. Those two words tolled in my mind like a medieval demand from a lighthouse bell, as I divided up the laundry.

So at 50, at Birkbeck, Middlesex and finally Goldsmiths, I read everything I could. Here at Goldsmiths I was allowed into every lecture, every classroom - the privilege of all doctoral students. I saw that our canon of knowledge is fragile, and fluctuates, like a parachute as it opens. This realisation developed as a seminal part of the pursuit of knowledge. It was me, learning how to listen. It was true that I knew the importance of listening: to the first murmurs of a baby, the yells of a toddler, the angst of a teenager, the woes of lovers.



But here at Goldsmiths I discovered other ways of listening: to Vic Seidler's account of his family's arrival and experiences after their escape from the Holocaust; to Les Back's book 'The Art of Listening', Maura Dooley's poetry, many other Goldsmith poets' work, Sally Alexander's social history, Blake Morrison's fatherly ways of instilling confidence in his student.

In "*Listening*", I have tried to needle through the gesture of the clustered group that recognition of the situation in the Mediterranean is not enough. I wanted a call to attention *a listening*, not only to the migrants, but also generally, to us, to one another, to find many, different, workable, compassionate, solutions to the migrant crisis. *A listening*, something different from the detention centres that hold people for up to ten years. I hope my work will remind and stir perhaps one person, perhaps maybe two young people, to have the nerve to be serious. Open the parachute.

Patsy Hickman has included GDWG in the list of her thanks associated with the sculpture and copies of Refugee Tales volumes I, II and III were donated to Goldsmiths for students as a wider part of the installation.

Making a contribution to GDWG where everyone wins!

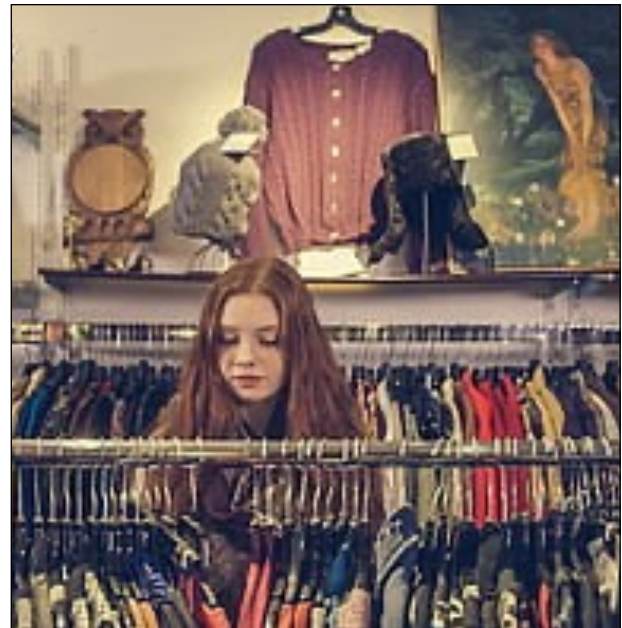
By Cassie Oakman

There are many different ways to support a cause that resonates with us. What we can do depends on our temperament and how much time or money we can spare. For GDWG, ways to help include volunteering to visit detainees, assisting with fund-raising drives, walking with refugees and released detainees, or collecting clothing for those still in detention.

There's always a need for men's clothing for the people supported by GDWG. Most of us are lucky enough to take for granted that we have at least one spare outfit, so that our clothes can be washed. This is so important for human dignity, and it is to our shame that there are people in this country who don't have this. Many of us who support GDWG bring in our own clothing when it is no longer wanted, but I've been looking at ways of doing more, in spite of having a small budget of both money and time!

Like others, I've let my work and social communities know that I collect suitable (clean and in good condition) men's clothes, and that I am happy to take them to GDWG next time I go. I've also got into the habit of visiting my local charity shops before a trip to Crawley, to look out for secondhand clothing to buy and take in. For very little outlay, I can usually assemble half a dozen pairs of jeans and sometimes also some shoes and coats. This benefits two groups of people: the money goes to support a charity, and the purchases help to provide for those who may literally have nothing but the clothes

they stand up in. We are at last becoming aware that the throw-away model of society is not a sustainable one, and that, whilst recycling is good, re-using is even better. Many charity shops don't have space to display all the clothing they receive. Although unsold items can be recycled in textile banks, it's even more environmentally friendly if clothing can be given a second lease of life by someone who really needs it. I have several times been in a charity shop, buying for GDWG, where the person on the till has pointed out to a colleague that there is now room on the rails to bring through more goods from the back storage room. So the shop and the charity it serves benefit from a quicker throughput of donations, as well as from the payment itself. I love making a contribution to GDWG where everyone wins like this.



February 2020

Poem by a visitor with GDWG

By Adam Green

I visit you in purgatory
Somewhere between heaven and hell
I visit you in purgatory
...as far as I can tell
You exist within these walls
Looking for redemption
After serving your sentence complete
You're now in indefinite detention
This sentence just for being here
Your first visit oversea
Abandoned by those you trusted
You lost your only ID
You tell me your story I listen,
challenging all my perceptions
I left my judgement with my wallet and
keys
In a locker in the reception
You tell me your sins You don't seem
proud
you look back with reflection
And after all, you're just like me
Never claiming you have perfection
You want release from this torture
But to heaven not to hell
What's going on with your case?
It's impossible for me to tell.
You get a ticket given to you
They come in the dead of the night

You say you cannot go back
They chat and understand your plight
With false hope of review
Spared to apply for asylum again
If you can give us a few more details
We need to FEEL your pain
But with a solicitor who won't talk
But is fine claiming legal aid
Countless messages left
Not a single callback made
Then a little ray of hope
a new solicitor who seems quite caring
She installs a glimmer of hope
Her name echoes success and daring
But all silent from the enemy
Seems like they are playing cunning
Cards close to their chest
They won't tell you when they are coming
There's radio silence for a while
You message me on a Sunday
You ask me to call your new solicitor
I call them early monday
I message you Monday with an update
I feel like I'm not much assistance
My message doesn't send
But it goes with a bit of persistence
I visit you on Monday evening
With some trousers to drop off to you
The man on reception greets me
But looks a little confused

We're not expecting you,
I haven't booked my visit I fear
I have and show him confirmation
More confusion then "he's not here"
But if bail was given he'd tell me
If Deported he wasn't informed
They can't give me any more information
Just "he isn't here any more"
I wonder if you made it to heaven
Or ended up back in hell
I wonder if I'll ever know
Because those who do know will not tell.
It was only 24 hours,
since your message seeking information
Did they come in the middle of the night
To take you back to your nation
I guess I will never know
What fate you did befall
A part of me sometimes wonders
If you ever existed at all
But you existed there in purgatory
Somewhere between heaven and hell
Yes you existed there in purgatory
As far as I can tell

Meet the new member of our staff team: Izzy Sutherland

Izzy has just recently joined the GDWG team as an intern working on 'Walk with Us', our walking project for people who have experienced detention who join our walking community for monthly walks. Izzy is passionate about the goal of ending indefinite detention and raising awareness on the subject of detention in the UK.

Izzy began volunteering for 'Refugees Welcome - Crawley' four years ago and later became co-chair of the education committee. Since then, Izzy has been involved with Refugee Tales, organising projects in the community and delivering assemblies to young people as part of the outreach work. Izzy is delighted to be contributing to the fantastic work of GDWG alongside her studies at Drama School in London.



Do you like being out in the great outdoors? Do you enjoy walking?

By Christina Fitzsimons

Come and join us for a day or for the whole of our July Refugee Tales walk. We can promise you fresh air and exercise, good food and the best of company. It is a very special experience. This year is particularly important as it also marks the 25th anniversary of GDWG and its pioneering work supporting people held in immigration detention.



This year's route starts in Three Bridges (on the outskirts of Crawley), where the original GDWG offices were. We walk north to join the North Downs Way at Dorking. From there the route goes west along the Downs and then south west to Winchester. Our overnight stops are at Three Bridges, Dorking, Guildford, Farnham and Four Marks. The route covers old walking routes, including the North Downs Way and St Swithun's Way, and finishes in the historic city of Winchester, which has welcomed visitors and walkers for many hundreds of years. We can promise the most beautiful countryside and stunning views.

You may be wondering how fit you need to be to join the walk. We will be walking for four or five hours a day. However, we go at a relaxed pace - it is more about enjoying the walk than getting speedily to the destination - and we always have an hour for lunch. Best of all, there is tea and cake on offer when you finish. The route does have some hills but nothing really steep. The main thing is that you need sufficient stamina to walk 12-14 miles on consecutive days.

I would advise fitness preparation including doing some 2-3 hour walks in the months leading up to July. I can also recommend doing some short faster walks - just 20 minutes on a regular basis can be really valuable in building up your fitness.

Please get in touch if we can give you any help or advice on fitness requirements and book your tickets promptly as we sell out fast!

Thoughts on a silver anniversary....

By Louise Williamson (GDWG Trustee)

I was 10 when my parents celebrated their silver wedding anniversary. This was a big event in our family of five - my parents and my two older sisters. We would have a big buffet lunch on a Saturday at home for the extended family and friends, which meant lots of advance talk about what food we'd prepare for everyone, what drink my dad would get in and where all the chairs would come from for everyone to sit on.

But more than the excitement and hard work in advance, what I most remember is my sense of awe that anyone could be married for so long. I don't think I knew how old my parents were at that point, but 25 years of marriage seemed an eternity - two and a half times my age.

As a newcomer to GDWG of only one year's standing, that's a bit how I feel about the fact that GDWG has been going for 25 years - awe. Even more impressive is the fact that GDWG doesn't merely exist - it's the fact that some of the founder members and visitors are still involved, and making a difference to the lives of those in detention, and are inspiring the rest of us to join with them in the struggle to bring indefinite detention to an end.

But this success story of the people who are GDWG not giving up is of course very bitter-sweet - because immigration detention is still with us, and GDWG is still needed. I waited to write this piece until after the general election, hoping desperately that we might have a new government committed to changing the

hostile immigration environment. Well, sadly it seems we don't. But we can take heart from the words of encouragement Anna wrote to us the day the election result was announced - we will keep up our conversations with parliamentarians, our friends, colleagues and neighbours, and of course we will continue our visiting, fundraising, walking, clothes collecting...

Just about all long-term relationships in our personal lives take a lot of hard work to keep them going, and there may well be times when we wonder if we're actually going to be able to carry on - it's too hard, too painful, there are often money worries, there's never enough time to do what we want to do...

So too with GDWG - it can sometimes just be too hard, too painful, there are often money worries, there's never enough time to do what we want to do... and yet GDWG carries on its vital work, WE carry on - some people still around from the very beginning in 1995, many others joining later on in GDWG's history to take the place of those who needed to move on to do other things. We pay tribute to them all - to us all - on our silver anniversary.



Goldsmiths Creative Writing project

By Jen Tindle

There was an air of apprehension hovering over staircase E in Goldsmiths College. A group of Visitors and Refugee Tales Walkers arrived outside the appointed room in ones and twos. The afternoon of Creative Writing, arranged by GDWG and Creative Writing MA students, to introduce us to how we could write and talk about our work with people in detention, was about to begin. Creative Writing does induce a flurry of emotions and we shared a few of our thoughts and aspirations, and in this, quickly formed a common purpose.

We were shown some of the basic structures of writing, ways to show intention through linking everyday words in a thoughtful way to 'show rather than tell' the Reader. This was to become our mantra as we attempted various exercises.

We were encouraged to focus our writing around elements of visiting or walking experiences. It quickly became apparent that there was a shared understanding of the feelings that are aroused in our work and the different exercises brought out elements of these. We were encouraged to let go of rules and linear thinking. This was challenging indeed but glimpses of a new horizon were there to be grasped before slipping away to leave a hint of anticipation.

We were encouraged, but not expected, to share our attempts. And our confidence grew and we relaxed. Our teachers were welcoming, encouraging and created a warm atmosphere in which we learnt and grew. Their skills imbued us with what could be. All too soon our time was up. It was a happy band that expressed thanks, goodbyes and excited thoughts to carry this on, and headed down staircase E with an enhanced awareness and confidence that ... We Can!



First Visits

By Louise Yu

12th September 2019 was the first time I visited a person in detention in Brook House. I was nervous for my first visit. On my way to this visit, I double- and triple-checked that I had my passport and bank statement, fearing that I would be told to return to Brighton at the reception desk because I had not brought the right documents with me. I stood outside Atlantic House, watching airport staff come and go. The free bus service to Brook House was late. I was worried that I would be late for my visit. Or worse, I was worried that the shuttle bus would never show up and I would have to cancel my visit. I was nervous to be there the first time on my own. The shuttle bus eventually arrived 3 minutes later. But to me, that felt like forever.



Going through the different buildings and security checks in Brook House was intimidating. Even though I had done my induction visit back in August with Karris and other new volunteers, there were still moments when I was confused. I would stand in front of a door, feeling unsure about whether I should open it on my own, or if I should wait to be called to enter into the next room.

Then, there is the wait inside the visiting area. I am used to having my phone 24/7, which I could rely on for entertainment, particularly during times when I had to wait for someone. However, without the palm-sized glowing block of entertainment in my hand, I felt lost. I got some water and drank it faster than I normally would. I felt my throat getting dry. My palms were sweaty. I kept looking around the room, reading out loud posters to myself in my head.

Suddenly, there was a click at the door. A guy walked out. He looked around the room. He saw me and smiled meekly. He took a seat opposite me. Then, we started talking. We talked about everything – weather, TV, cricket (which he played every day), food in the detention centre, food from home etc. Occasionally, he would talk about something more personal, for instance about his family, or his life before he was being detained. I sat there and simply listened.

I looked at him as he spoke. The corners of his mouth would turn up when he talked about cricket, or food his friends used to make for him. Lines would appear on his forehead when he talked about the day he got detained. While he talked, I listened, nodded and occasionally made remarks about what he had told me.

There would also be moments of silence. I hate lulls in conversations. Moments of silence make me nervous. I normally would jump in to make comments or ask questions when I sense the person who I am talking to is going to stop talking soon. However, during this and all my other subsequent visits, I had gotten used to silence and allowed moments of silence to exist.

The ending of a visit is always a bit sad. After having talked for more than an hour about everything, reality suddenly hits. It reminded me that at the end of the visit, I would get back onto the shuttle bus, take a train back to Brighton and return home, whereas the person I visited would have to return to his room, his temporary living space.

Since September 2019, my subsequent visits become more natural. There were less moments when I stood in front of doors at the detention centre, feeling confused. I have got into the habit of bringing a copy of my bank statement every Thursday.

The first person in detention I visited was released after several weeks and since then, I had also visited other people. Most of them are Mandarin speakers. Friends at home describe my Mandarin as rusty. They laughed when they heard that I had to speak in Mandarin 90 minutes per week. I, too, was nervous about speaking in Mandarin. But the Mandarin-speaking detainees I met were very understanding and patient with me. Just like any other visits, I would sit in a chair opposite the person, listen to what they would like to tell me, be it in Mandarin or English. By the end of each visit, they would thank me for taking the time to visit them and this is when I would see a smile, a glimmer of hope, on their faces.

It is these moments of hope in a seemingly bleak environment that motivate me to keep visiting someone at the detention centre every week.

Refugee Tales at the Silence Project

by Emma Parsons

In October 2019, Refugee Tales was invited to be part of the launch of The Silence Project in St Mary's Secret Garden in Hackney.

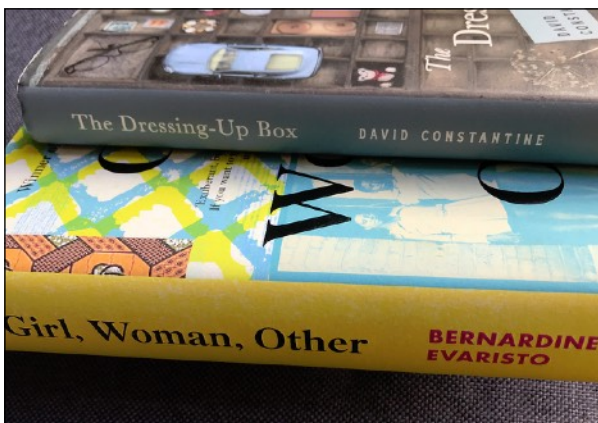
Allan Bell, the founder of The Silence Project asked for a representative from Refugee Tales to lead a silent walk and to break the silence only to prompt moments of reflection on the meaning of Refugee Tales. This was an intriguing brief, considering that one of the many special things about a Refugee Tales walk is that Refugee Tales frees up voices that are usually unheard. One of the sounds of a Refugee Tales walk is that of human connection through conversation.



But it soon became clear that Refugee Tales and the Silence Project wholly complement each other. The Silence Project is described as having four pillars: the Arts, Human Rights, Hospitality and Silence. This made for a day of music, poetry, dance, the sharing of food, and talks that highlighted the negative power of enforced silence and the positive power of silence through choice. Moyra Samuels of Justice4Grenfell spoke of how the voices of the residents of Grenfell Tower had been silenced, but also of the powerful impact of the silent marches that have been held since 72 people died in the fire in June 2017.

Activities held in silence included a compelling performance by a silent circus troupe and the silent Refugee Tales walk led by Emma Parsons, writer of The Teacher's Tale. Emma stopped at five different points on the walk and broke the silence to read excerpts from Refugee Tales. She ended the walk with Ali Smith's words, "We tell it like it is. We work towards the better imagined".

For more information on The Silence Project visit: www.thesilenceproject.co.uk



Book Review

By Mary Barrett

Two authors of Refugee Tales Volume 3 published acclaimed books in 2019. 'The Dressing-Up Box' is a collection of short stories by David Constantine who wrote 'The Orphan's Tale'. It is a remarkable set of stories, unsettling but always tender and full of humanity. Great care is taken to put each story in a recognisable setting and the characters are drawn with brilliant observation. Then the reader is presented with terror, despair or sorrow.

In 'Seeking Refuge' the narrator takes Fahrid for a coffee, they are in an upstairs café and can see a typical English town scene in May, trees in leaf, a church, shoppers walking in the sunshine and a succession of buskers. However this has no effect on Fahrid who cannot rid himself of the torment of his former life. The narrator tries to engage him, instead the asylum seeker is watching a horrific video of the killing of a child on his smartphone and instead of discussing the scene in front of him Fahrid is helped to describe the atrocity that has re-awakened his trauma.

Many of the stories involve children or innocent defenceless adults and it is very much of our time. The writing itself is a pleasure of precision and clarity. Highly recommended.

Everyone involved with Refugee Tales was delighted when Bernardine Evaristo was shortlisted for the Booker prize for her book 'Girl, Woman, Other'. Then she was named the co-winner with Margaret Atwood. Amazingly she is the first black woman to win the prize and has been lauded as a unique and exciting writer.

February 2020

Bernardine wrote 'The Social Worker's Tale' and can be seen reading it on the online 28for28 anthology.

In 'Girl, Woman, Other' we meet twelve women each complete individuals but whose lives touch throughout the book. These are women of all shapes, sizes, sexual orientation and age, mostly black or mixed race. One of my favourites is Shirley who is the 'Family Success Story' a history teacher at Peckham School for Girls, she endures racism in the classroom and staff room but 'over time Shirley became an experienced schoolteacher who remained committed to giving the kids a fighting chance'. Shirley does not find her life easy, despite her adoring husband Lennox and holidays spent in Barbados being waited on by Winsome her long suffering mother, retired from a life as a conductor on Routemaster buses. Shirley still manages to complain quite a lot. Shirley is genuine, a middle aged woman who despite a successful career and loving family still does not fit in to life as a middle class English woman.

This is a book in a unique style with few full stops or capital letters in its 450 pages. The beauty of it is that the unique style depicts eleven other women some of whom are carving successful fulfilling lives in twenty first century Britain. Bernardine writes with love, with a wry humour, and with a brilliant poetic imagination. I loved this book and recommend it to you.

The Dressing up Box.

Published by Comma Press.

Girl, Woman, Other.

Published by Hamish Hamilton

School Talks

By Sally Curtis

I have been a volunteer visitor with Gatwick Detainees Group for 18 months. Prior to this I had very limited knowledge of the issues around immigration and asylum generally and indefinite detention particularly. I have found that I am not alone in this, with many of my friends and family equally ignorant of the facts. I was shocked by my own lack of awareness and am keen to learn and raise awareness in others. In these times of 'Fake News' it seems especially important that children and young adults are presented with factual information and the chance to explore the issues in a safe space.



To this end I recently volunteered to support Daniel Eichner with an information session at a local secondary school. We arrived at the start of the school day to speak to a large assembly of mainly 17-year-old students. The full assembly then split into smaller groups. We were able to do more detailed briefings to these groups with students having the opportunity to participate by asking questions and to debate the issues we raised.

Daniel took the lead in both of the small group sessions with me providing a volunteer's account of visiting people who are detained indefinitely on the Gatwick sites. Daniel's presentation both informs and provides the opportunity for the students to interact with the issues.

The level of student engagement differed according to levels of confidence. The presentation clearly made an impact on all the students and their teachers, who were supportive of the sessions. Here is a comment from a student about the sessions: "It was a really good lesson that allowed me to understand the suffering of asylum seekers/people who have had to leave their homes."

Note from the office: our thanks to Sally and please let Daniel know if this article encourages you to get involved sharing your visitor experiences in talks to local schools in 2020.

'i am only present' - a visual sociology of Brook House Immigration Removal Centre

What happens when you start to think about the materiality of the environment around an Immigration Removal Centre? - By Andreas Lopperthin.

I spent the first half of 2019 taking the train to Gatwick Airport and walking around in the industrial estate behind the runway, where Brook House Immigration Removal Centre is located. I was curious about the environment. How addressing the materiality of the building and its surroundings might help to understand more about British and European immigration policies. Now, I have been asked to share some thoughts on this

research, and I hope that it might resonate with the important work done in Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group.

The journeys described above, were part of my Visual Sociology Master thesis at Goldsmiths, University of London, in which I did research on Brook House. Visual Sociology is about merging the artistic and the scientific, while embracing the ambiguity of the world we live in. To me, this meant generating as many different pieces of information about Brook House as I could. I walked up and down Old Brighton Road. I watched documentaries. I read reports, planning documents and newspaper articles. I heard accounts from people in detention and from their visitors. I looked at complex webs of private and public actors involved in running the centre.

This scavenging for information left me with a detailed but confusing picture of Brook House, needing to be weaved together to a patchwork that could give descriptions and ask new questions. This was complicated further by an itching concern; how could I as an outsider speak about the suffering of the people in detention? I was reluctant of turning to the often used move of 'giving voice' to a marginalized group - who am I to give and take agency from other human beings?

Instead, I decided to give voice to the building itself. This took the form of an essay film, wherein Brook House guides the viewer through Gatwick Airport, and around the runway, to the industrial estate where the centre is located. By letting the building speak, I attempted to award Brook House a metaphorical agency, highlighting the material aspects

February 2020

of the hostile environment policies. And I tried to draw attention to the violence and exclusion created by these policies.

It is my hope that my work might create a better understanding of the role played by physical environments in immigration detention, while spreading knowledge about the way the state treats the people it has decided are unwanted. What follows is an excerpt from the narration of the film. A full version of the film is accessible here:

<https://vimeo.com/354976837>

Here is an excerpt from the narration of the film:

'You pass my neighbours Acro Aircraft Seating, RS Components, World Duty Free Distribution Centre, Gate Gourmet. They produce things, store them, process them. So do I. We're all in that business around here, storing, producing, processing. Food, chocolate, furniture, humans.'



Refugee Tales events The Power of Youth!

By Ollie Fox

I have been part of the GDWG team for almost a year now and ever since, I have felt so passionate and driven to fight for the charity's cause and to teach people (particularly my age group) about the UK's often unknown and inhumane detention policies. I have tried to do all I can to raise awareness where possible, and I've been overwhelmed by the response that myself and my peers have received.



I was invited by my friends to do a short talk about indefinite detention and GDWG, who had organised a Refugee Tales event at the Extinction Rebellion protests in London in October, trying to raise awareness about the impact of climate change on forced displacement and the refugee crisis. We were also joined by the wonderful David Herd who read a tale and provided the audience with his knowledge about the cruel nature of indefinite detention. The event was nothing but emotional and moving. The amount of people that came up to me after asking to get involved, or to pass thanks on to GDWG for what they fight

February 2020

for was remarkable. Also, to see so many people from my generation at the talk, passionate and interested was so promising and empowering for everyone.

The success of this event has only pushed me to be a part of more events. A few weeks ago, we hosted another 'Refugee Tales' event at our University (Sussex). Despite falling on the week that lecturers and university staff were striking, the amount of people that turned up to listen was incredible. An evening of singing, spoken word, storytelling and once again, engaging work from David proved to be so successful. There were 100 students and staff in the audience, raising almost £400 for GDWG.

Of course, I am proud of myself and my friends for being part of this fight, but none of this would have happened without GDWG. I would like to thank everyone at the charity for giving me this opportunity to work with such selfless individuals, fighting for such an essential an important cause. I feel honoured to be a part of GDWG. My strive to raise awareness will not stop.



This writing, by Christa, was written after she attended our creative writing session...

An Immigrant

By Christa Wilson

I often wonder how long it takes to confront the demons sending them packing. Perhaps they always linger in the crevices of the mind and pop out from time to time, flashing up the scene in the most unexpected places. Maybe the demons are lifelong and are managed as acceptance as to who you are grows stronger. To get rid of the demon that constantly reminds you that you are of that land so you must be responsible for the serious crimes that occurred there, is the hardest even now. The idea that earlier generations can taint current ones comes to mind.

For a four year old, the cold January journey seemed to go on for ever; firstly the train journey, followed by an overnight boat, and another two train journeys. The mother and child were travelling to meet her husband in a country called England. As they arrived at Brackley Station, they could see, through the steam and smoke of the train, a man was waiting for them on the platform with a large bunch of white lilacs. Where do lilacs come from in January?

They trudged through the snow to their new home, not a city home which they left, but a countryside one with fields, huge trees, and open spaces. Versions Farm appeared at the end of the long drive. The husband and father worked on the farm as he had decided not to go back to Germany after being released from Prisoner of War camp. He feared

that life in Communist Berlin would be dangerous and chaotic. Experiences of being dragged out with sand bottles at the age of nine to fight left him with an anxiety about living in Germany. He was a city boy training to be an Architect before the war, and now here he was in the countryside working as a general factotum for the landed gentry, acting as butler, growing vegetables, tending the garden, or doing whatever was asked of him.

As could be imagined so soon after the war the family were viewed with suspicion and every misdemeanour that occurred was laid at their door, including the theft of a pony and trap. The accuser, the Groom, was caught trying to sell them at a local pub.

During the first weeks and months the child was protected by the parents from any snipes or cruel words. However it must be said she was quite a feisty girl. On one occasion her parents went out one evening, leaving her alone in the house. The cook was supposed to be looking in every now and again. The girl woke up, found no-one there, so climbed out of the window and went off to find the cook. She was reprimanded the following day by her parents but could never quite understand how they found out.

School halted all the protection and safety. Off to Feed My Lambs Primary School with only two words of English 'Toilet Please'. She could hear everything, but hear nothing. The noise and confusion was overwhelming culminating in tears. The teacher gathered her up and she remained on her lap for most of the day. Gradually she began to understand

what all the name calling and jibes meant. The constant battering became so fierce that the parents scrimped and scraped to send her to a little private school in the hope that it would be a calmer place. Mostly it was until the 11 plus, when one of the Intelligence Papers seemed quite familiar. The girl mentioned this to a friend from another school who in turned told her father. The upshot was that the paper had to be done again. When the class found out, they all attacked the girl. Even to this day the flashbacks are strong; an eleven year old with her head in her arms on the desk with a crowd around her hitting and shouting. If life was going to be like this for ever, was it worth going on.

Football should be mentioned here as it culminated in the family's acceptance into the local community. The father excelled at Football and played for the Brackley team. His position was centre forward and he was one of the highest goal scorers in the team. The local paper mentioned his successes frequently along with photos of the team. The away games were the most exciting for the family as it meant travelling on a coach and having the treat of a packet of Smith's crisps, the one with the blue salt packet. Many similarities can be drawn between the Manchester Goalkeeper, Bert Trautmann, who was a German too.

Vignettes of kindness occasionally shone through in particular when the family were homeless. A local family asked them to stay in their front room until they had somewhere to live. Visiting a hospitable family for tea, evokes memories of meat paste sandwiches, beetroot juice covering the lettuce, an introduction to playing cards, the mum of

February 2020

the household always in her hat and overalls when indoors, and ringing a chicken's neck.

A positive aspect of such experiences is the understanding and empathy that can be given to others who endure similar events in their lives. As the years go by the antipathy fades and assimilation is virtually complete. Language and accent are the same as others and no-one sees a person from somewhere else. Sadly though others undergo the same victimisation today. Different countries. Different faces. The same hostility lives on. Fortunately so too does kindness.

Walks coming up:

Saturday 7 March - Walk With Us from Farnham

Sunday 26 April - Walk With Us from Chepstow

Sunday 17 May - Walk With Us from Lingfield

Saturday 6 June - Walk With Us from Deal

For more information on walks, please email refugeetales@gdwg.org.uk and ask to be added to the Refugee Tales mailing list for walkers.

3 to 8 July is the Refugee Tales walk from Crawley to Winchester. For full details see the website: www.refugeetales.org

GDWG Birthday:

Tuesday 5 May - GDWG AGM and birthday event at Crawley URC. We shall be celebrating 25 years of visits by our dedicated volunteers. Guest speaker: novelist Kamila Shamsie.

Saturday 1 August - Summer Party for GDWG and Refugee Tales volunteers and supporters, staff, trustees and people with lived experience of detention. A beautiful summer evening party with live music, food and in the exquisite setting of the Sussex Prairie Garden <https://www.sussexpriaries.co.uk> All very welcome.

Designed by Eli Barrott

