

# GATWICK DETAINEES WELFARE GROUP



“The Home Office approach to immigration detention is careless and cavalier – including casework failures, insufficient judicial safeguards, and a general lack of humanity in the system.”

**Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP**



House of Commons Home Affairs Committee

## HASC Report Summary by Jean Gould

Reading the summary of the (HASC) Home Office Affairs Select Committee’s very thorough report on Immigration Detention is an unexpectedly uplifting experience. Here’s a flavour of what they have to say: “Too often the Home Office has shown a shockingly cavalier attitude to the deprivation of human liberty and the protection of people’s

basic rights.”  
“The Home Office has utterly failed in its responsibilities to oversee and monitor the safe and humane detention of individuals in the UK.”  
The HASC report is resolutely critical of the gap between the policy rhetoric and the lived reality for people in detention. The inquiry began with Brook House following the Panorama programme, but broadened its scope to encompass the whole detention estate. If the

wide-ranging challenges and findings on IRCs are not addressed, the report predicts ‘yet more catastrophic abuses taking place under the Government’s watch’.

### Brook House

The report finds that ‘the lack of activities and facilities at Brook House have drastically failed to meet statutory requirements’ leaving a void with little to alleviate frustration or help to ameliorate mental health problems.

HASC focuses on the need to promote the availability for both staff and detained people of a robust whistleblowing procedure that fully protects individuals. It goes on to talk about the need for effective monitoring to expose inappropriate behaviour, uphold professional standards and promote a healthy culture. It doesn't pull any punches: *The formal oversight mechanisms currently in place to ensure effective, safe and humane management of IRCs are clearly not working; this is evident from the disgusting abuse of detainees by some staff revealed by an undercover journalist at Brook House IRC in 2017. Six of the seven IRCs across the UK are contracted out to a handful of outsourcing firms including G4S, Serco, Mitie and the GEO group. Accountability for any serious misconduct rests with the Home Office, which is ultimately responsible for the effective operation of our immigration detention estate. We must not forget too that the Home Office monitoring staff were on site and did not raise any concerns about*

*wrongdoing at Brook House IRC.*

Lastly, specifically in relation to Brook House HASC criticises the Government for sitting on its own commissioned report into financial misconduct there.

### **Overview of the rest**

The committee started from the premise that detention is an essential part of immigration control, and then criticises every aspect of the current system and recommends better and wider use of alternatives to detention. HASC points out that, despite the recent reduction in the numbers of people detained, in 2018 the UK's detention estate was still one of the largest in Europe. Like its predecessor reports, it points out that detention should be used only if there are no other options, as a last resort prior to removal. The power should be exercised for the shortest possible time and only when there is a realistic prospect of removal within a reasonable period. From start to finish the system is found wanting. About the detention decision, the reports says,

"It is extremely troubling that in the immigration and asylum system people can be deprived of their liberty through an entirely paper-based exercise by officials where no one involved in the decision ever interviews the potential detainee.." This bureaucratic approach avoids the need for decision makers ever to face the human beings whose freedoms they are taking away. Steven Shaw tellingly described to the committee a caseworker "unnerved by the process of going to an IRC or meeting people about whom she may have made decisions, because it humanised them". HASC recommends the initial decision being made by the Home Office, but reviewed by an independent judge after 72 hours. It also calls for thorough face-to-face pre-detention screening to facilitate disclosure of vulnerability. The report has detailed sections on:

- children (calling for legislation to prevent families being separated and children taken into care);
- older people, (calling for an end to any detention

- beyond 60 unless there are special reasons):
- LGBTQI (calling for recognition that this group is vulnerable in detention and recommending that the HO keep and publish statistics on LGBTQI detention), and
  - asylum seekers (“While we accept it is the intention only to detain people where there are public protection reasons to do so, in practice we are concerned that too many asylum seekers are being detained who may not need to be, and that inappropriate decisions are being taken to lock people up.”)

Unsurprisingly the report finds the adults at risk policy is “clearly not protecting the vulnerable people that it was introduced to protect” and urges the Government to “abolish the three AAR levels of risk and to revert to its previous policy of a presumption not to detain

vulnerable individuals except “in very exceptional circumstances”. “ The Rule 35 procedure has failed to serve its purpose of identifying people who should be released from detention on grounds of vulnerability. HASC concludes that it is plagued by delays, sets too high an evidential burden and that senior Home Office officials are overturning internal review panel recommendations. It welcomes the Government’s promise to review the procedure, a review it has yet to undertake, and calls for it to be completed by the end of June 2019. The lack of access to adequate legal support comes in for sharp words too, with HASC criticising the failure of Government to “address radically the current failings in the system and [provide] legal advice to some of the most vulnerable individuals who are held in immigration detention’, and recommending the restoration of legal aid in immigration and parity between people detained

in prisons and IRCs. Responsibility for the length of detention and for delays is laid firmly at the door of the Home Office and not, as the HO would have it, with people detained. Quite simply the report argues that if there is no prospect of imminent removal people should not be detained, and decisions to detain must be clearly justified to enable people to challenge them. The report makes no less than 64 recommendations, including many close to all our hearts. Here’s just one, “It is time to implement radical change. In line with the Joint Committee on Human Rights, we urge the Government to bring an end to indefinite immigration detention and to implement a maximum 28-day time limit with immediate effect.

## **Spring thoughts from our patron**

**by Baroness Helena Kennedy QC**

I am delighted to be the patron of Gatwick Detainee Welfare Group to show my wholehearted support for the work that your many volunteer visitors do each day. Agreeing to become patron of the charity was something I was keen to do as your volunteers transform the lives of those detained. The work of the GDWG requires much empathy, experience and patience in assisting those whose lives have been shattered by appalling circumstances. Unconditional friendship offers hope to those who have already suffered so much and are in such difficult situations. For those who have often been deeply traumatised, who may have lost all trust and witnessed systemic failings, GDWG shines out as a beacon of hope in a troubled world.

If deciding why to support is easy, deciding how to support is harder. We all lead busy lives! This newsletter is full of supporters of GDWG who take inspiring action to support those in immigration detention. You, too, can help and without even leaving the comfort of your own home:

1. Please read this newsletter. It keeps you informed about what Anna and the team are doing and how you might be able to help in the future. Even better, pass the newsletter to family and friends who are not already familiar with the work of GDWG. Raise awareness of the policy of indefinite detention and the harm it inflicts.

2. Please donate. Every penny counts. If you could spare a financial contribution

this month to help pay for a phone card for a detainee or even set up a standing order to make a small donation each month, you might not notice the difference - but GDWG certainly will. Make a regular donation by going to: [www.gdwg.org.uk](http://www.gdwg.org.uk)



## What being a visitor means to me

by Najwa Mounla

I am on my way to visit a new person in detention; to befriend a person I know very little about. I check my ID and other documents necessary to enter Brook

House. *Once I was returned home to bring the right documents.* I drive in silence and stillness towards Gatwick Airport. I wonder will the queue of visitors

be long today? Is the person in detention waiting for me so we can meet without delay? More than once I waited for an hour. I heard some Visitors say they would not wait that long. *I tell them but these are people in detention. When you are incarcerated without a time limit, time becomes different. And sometimes people wish to be alone.*

I arrive at the Gate and announce through the microphone the name of the man I am visiting and add his nationality. *One time recently, I got both the name wrong and the nationality. This is because the person in detention had given me a different spelling of his name and a different nationality to the ones recognised in the Centre records.* But I do not make an issue of this because the important thing is to gain access to visit and befriend.

I park my car in the area provided and wonder- what is his story? *Is it the kind of story that will keep me awake at night? Will he be one of those who is highly knowledgeable of various topics that will enrich and delight the Visit?* Reception is empty. Good. I proceed quickly. By now most of the staff recognise me as a

Volunteer Visitor and check me fast.

I leave everything in the locker provided except a few coins for our tea. I proceed to the Visitors Room. I wonder; *Does my detainee like his tea with sugar and no milk as most Arabs?*

I arrive at the Visitor's room at the same time as the man I am visiting. I *hesitate for a second before I stretch my hand to shake his.*

We sit- as instructed- opposite each other with the cups of tea between us on the little table. I sit and listen. I accept this person in front of me for who he is. My role is to befriend and bring hope in any form I can think of.

I believe in Being in Life. So I continue sitting, listening and Being.





## **An enduring legacy**

**by Anna Pincus**

If you've seen our legacy leaflet, you may have considered whether to include the work of the GDWG in your will. Writing a will is something we often put off and something that it's wise to do. We have benefitted greatly from legacies, and if you are considering helping us in this way, please know that it can make a big difference to us. One legacy, for example, has been used to reach out to people in detention who are isolated by language. It has funded the translation of some of our literature and from the inspiration of this legacy our diversity sub-group was formed. They are currently reaching out to Tamil and Polish community groups in Crawley to create a team of 'first responder' interpreter volunteers with the language skills that are so essential to us. This work will enable us to support people in detention who might otherwise remain out of reach both to us and to the positive interventions we can make. Talking about legacies isn't easy. It can seem a taboo. But the difference legacies make is huge and if you feel you can have difficult conversations on our behalf with friends and contacts, it may be worth it for the difference it can make.

## **The spectator/supporter perspective**

**by Meg Palmer**

Water bottle - check. Snacks - check. Plasters (for post marathon blisters) - check. Brighton Marathon app downloaded - check. Course route printed out in case app doesn't work - check. Enormous balloon in the shape of Joe's lucky number inflated so he can spot us amongst the crowds (well, one of his two digit lucky number as two enormous balloons seemed a tad excessive) - check.

Preparation for Marathon spectators/supporters is rigorous and plans should not be left to the last minute if you wish to ensure success. Alice, his partner, and I were the support crew and we left early to get our runner to the starting line in good time. Having previously run a pretty quick half marathon (1h 24m for those keen on the stats), Joe was to start with the 'elite' group separate from most of the runners. We proudly escorted him to Withdean Park where awe-inspiring individuals were gathering. Built almost entirely of sinew, these people ran everywhere, had extremely focused expressions, clearly never interacted with sugar and were permanently 'in the zone'. Joe ran off happily with the group, waving and smiling as we cheered him on.

Realising we would never make it back to our first planned sighting spots at the two and five mile marks - he was obviously going to get to those before us, we made our way through the supporters lining the route. Positioning ourselves at the thirteen mile mark, we joined the crowds applauding and encouraging every passing runner. The ones who had had

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the foresight to have their names printed on their running vests got personalised comments 'Keep going Rose!' 'Come on Sean!' Alice was in charge of the app showing our position in relation to Joe. She soon became adept at determining precise balloon elevation timings and within a few minutes, yes, there he is, still smiling 'Come on Joe - you're smashing it!' One and a half seconds later he was gone and we retired for a well-deserved cuppa and restorative slice of banana bread - supporting/spectating is physically and emotionally draining work!

Back to the app and the realisation that getting near the finish line should be our next move. We took our places in the last mile of the course and waited, cheering, clapping and encouraging the front runners. Balloon up, he's getting close....and there he was. Now resembling an exhausted but determined rhinoceros, no more smiles but loping along to the finish line.

A few minutes later we met our conquering hero with his medal and shiny blanket walking slowly and gingerly along. Alternately beaming and wincing, he was thrilled with his 3h 18m time. We plodded back to a café for a post marathon toasty and debrief.

It was a fabulous experience. The atmosphere was incredibly positive. Joe was heard to utter the words 'never again' but I hope he might change his mind. If you are ever feeling a bit jaded and in need of cheering up, go to a charity running event. Whether it's a 5k or an ironman triathlon, I'm sure you will find gold medal levels of the feel good factor. It is not too late to donate: <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/joe-fraser3>



## **Break out** **by Marygold Lewis**

Dance to the moon  
Sing for the sun  
Climb on top of a mountain  
And descend at a run

Swim in a river  
Cry in the wood  
Laugh at a sunset  
Oh, if only you could

Pretend that these bars  
Are a thicket of trees  
Then close your eyes slowly  
Get down on your knees

Pray for an answer  
Look far and wide  
For someone to help you  
Or somewhere to hide

Reach out to those others  
Who aren't looking at you  
Then plead with them nicely  
Oh, what can you do

You are only a youth  
With such a big plan  
Yet you're locked in a building  
And feel that you're damned

How could this happen  
To someone like me  
Who is only guilty  
Of trying to flee

From the war and the killing  
That left me alone  
With no family to help me  
And the future unknown

I fled for my life  
Over desert and sea

Only to find myself  
Locked up and not free

Please show me that mountain  
Let me climb to the top  
To look out on a country  
That is trying to stop

Others like me  
Ending up in a cell  
Please allow them to dream  
Of getting out of this hell

I fall on my knees  
And pray to the sun  
While I finally prepare  
To descend at a run

I will swim in a river  
And gaze at the moon  
My time is now coming  
Not a moment too soon

So please give me my pride  
And give it right now  
I demand to have freedom  
I will no longer bow



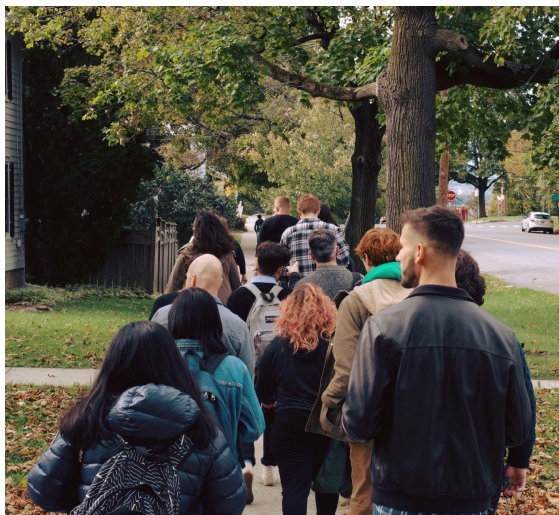
## Walking the border

by David Herd

This year, Refugee Tales will walk for the fifth time. For anybody involved in the project, in whatever capacity, this is surely a remarkable thing. An idea born in Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group, driven

by the need to communicate the stories and realities of people held in indefinite detention, has so caught the imagination as to sustain hundreds of miles of collective, cultural, political action. The call, at every step, has been for an end to indefinite detention, and the way that call has been made has been by sharing the stories of those who have experienced that terrible system. Those stories have been told in many ways and in many settings, and not least in the past year, when our friends who have experienced detention have spoken in parliament, at meetings across the country, and on the BBC.

The fact that Refugee Tales is marking its fifth anniversary means that the project must necessarily reflect on what has changed. Certainly it could not have been anticipated, when we started planning in



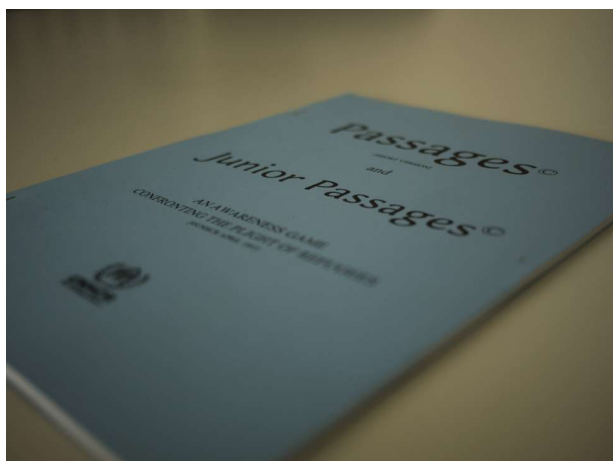
the summer of 2014, that we would be walking through such intensely turbulent and troubling times. What it would perhaps also have been difficult to predict is the way in which the question of detention has come to the fore in political discussion. At the time of writing it remains possible that there will be an amendment to the current Immigration Bill calling for an end to indefinite detention, And if that amendment is laid there is every possibility that a change of law will be achieved. This process might yet be thwarted, by the machinations surrounding Brexit, but even so the message is clear. The argument for an end to indefinite detention has been won.

At the same time, even as the argument is being won, there are too many ways in which the project has to report no change. So while some people who walk with the project who have experienced

detention have now regularised their status, there are other people whose circumstances have not altered since 2014. Five years have gone by and people who were then caught in the terrible limbo of the hostile environment are still in that position; that limbo -as The Arriver's Tale put it - which is 'the edge of hell'. This is not something that can be accepted and as we continue to call for an end to indefinite detention, so we also call for the hostility that shapes UK asylum policy to be brought to an immediate end.

Acutely concerned, however, as Refugee Tales is, with the realities of detention and post-detention existence, it is also, as our patron Ali Smith has said, a walk towards 'the better imagined'. Each year, as we have walked, and as we have sought to provide a context in which people's

stories can be safely heard, so we have also tried to create a space in which better thinking and action can take shape. This year, the walk's route goes from Brighton to Hastings. In other words, having taken the project into London and to Parliament in each of the past three years, this year Refugee Tales will walk the border. Here again we want to imagine better. Across the five days of the walk we will hear a series of talks under the heading 'Beyond the Border'. The purpose of the talks will be to picture human movement and political geography in ways that are not governed by hostility and which do not put people seeking asylum at constant risk. Nobody underestimates this task, of course, but nor do we think that the border cannot be reimagined. And crucially, of course, an end to indefinite detention is one aspect of that re-imagining. The UK, as has been observed many times before, is the only country in Europe that detains people indefinitely under immigration rules. To change that fact will be to make a significant change in the way the border is constructed. This year, as ever then, as we make our way along the southern coast, we will walk in order to better imagine.



## Passages: experiencing a GDWG training evening

by **Antonia Bunnin**

I'd never heard of Passages until a few months ago, when an email popped into my inbox from GDWG, inviting me to take part. The invitation explained that Passages is a simulation game, designed to increase understanding of the experiences of refugees. I had no idea what to expect, but thought it sounded interesting and was keen to deepen my understanding, so I signed up.

And so it was that on an April evening I found myself in a hall in Crawley, along with 12 others - all volunteers or staff from GDWG and Refugee Tales - taking on a new identity as a character in a family, getting to know my 'relatives', then very quickly being hurled into the turmoil of having to flee our home to escape danger and traveling to seek sanctuary in unfamiliar lands.

Passages is very cleverly designed because it engages you, as a participant, on both an intellectual and emotional level. I and my newly-formed family were almost immediately having to make decisions about where to go, how to look

after each other, how to stay safe. We were confronted with the kinds of practical problems and dilemmas that people suddenly leaving their homes to journey to unknown destinations might well face. At the same time, and alongside this problem-solving, we were having to deal with fear, uncertainty, anxiety, and finding ourselves at times powerless and bewildered in the face of authority. I won't give too much away here, because the less you know what to

expect, the more effective the exercise when you take part. But discussions afterwards revealed that our whole group found it emotionally powerful and extremely thought-provoking. It also helped us understand more deeply the kinds of situations that force people to uproot, leave their homes, and become refugees, and how arbitrary and uncontrollable are so many of the factors affecting their subsequent fates.

Clearly Passages is just an exercise and only gives a brief and tiny taste of what it must be like to be a refugee. It isn't totally immersive, and aims to simulate, not replicate, the experiences of refugees. But even in a few hours, it generated strong feelings and new insights for all the participants.

Finally, a word of appreciation for Daniel, GDWG Advocacy Co-ordinator, who facilitated the whole session very skilfully. Passages was created by the UNHCR and is used as an educational tool in many countries. Daniel runs it mainly with schools, but it is valuable for people of all ages, including those with many years' experience of working with and supporting refugees. If you get a chance to take part, I highly recommend it.

## **Welcome to Karris: Our new GDWG Advocacy Co-ordinator**

Karris joined GDWG full time as an Advocacy Coordinator in February 2019. Before joining the team she was a volunteer visitor with SOAS Detainee Support (SDS) for two years. Volunteering with SDS opened her eyes to the injustice people are experiencing whilst being held in immigration detention and inspired her to join GDWG.

She has always been interested in and passionate about issues that affect migrants and people seeking asylum. She studied International Politics and Sociology at City University of London, where she wrote her dissertation on how public attitudes in the UK have changed towards migration since mass migration began. Throughout her time at university Karris volunteered with the British Red Cross at their destitution centre in Hackney, London and at Asylum Aid as a legal administrative volunteer. At the British Red Cross she worked with destitute migrants; providing people with a warm meal, food parcels, somewhere to wash their clothes, use the computer, get clothes for themselves and their families and also join activities such as learning English. She also undertook casework here, supporting people who attended the centre with getting information and referring them to other charities who could support them.

Karris started her working career at Look Ahead Care, Support and Housing, where she worked in a high support accommodation for people experiencing mental health issues. She worked as a Core Support Worker, working with a

caseload of residents to create their own support plan, helping them map out how they could achieve their goals and assisting them with solving challenges they faced. While working in this role she supported several people who had experienced or were going through the asylum process. Before joining GDWG Karris was working at STOPAIDS, an HIV advocacy charity, based in London. She was Office Coordinator there and focused on building their digital reach and community fundraising support.

Karris says, 'My first few months at GDWG have been busy and full of learning! I'm really enjoying the role and supporting people in detention. I feel very lucky to have joined such a wonderful team of staff and volunteers. Thank you to everyone for welcoming me with open arms!'

## **On visiting** **by John Barrett**

Write something on visiting said Anna and I have found this to be quite self-revealing. It has made me wonder why I visit at all.

I can imagine what it is like to be in the same place day after day, the routine, the system, the mindless rules, the isolation and the claustrophobia. My weekly travel to the detention centre is an attempt to let a different view waft into 'Visits', to try to be simply an understanding person

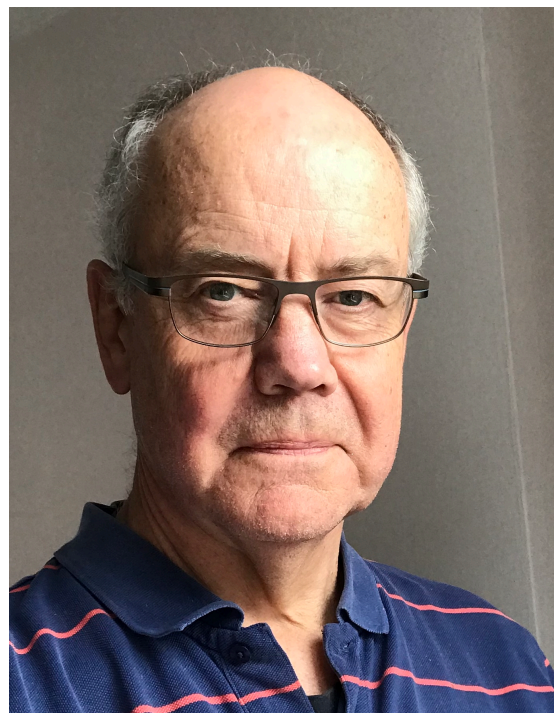
though I often feel frustrated by my own impotence to change anything.

This makes visiting sound like a chore but I do get a lot from it. I know much more about the world than I did. I know about the sand dunes in Algeria, river banks and

fishing in DRC, coconut groves in Sri Lanka as well as the beauty of upland Bangladesh and the coast of southern Somalia. Sadly, I also know how vicious traffickers are in the Sahara, what it feels like to be out of touch with family, the shame attached to incarceration and the desperation of uncertainty

However looking back over twenty plus years, I have met some amazing and resilient young men who have overcome great problems and setbacks. Some have kept in touch with me while others have plainly be happy to shake the 'dust' of Brook House off their feet and have never looked back. I understand.

My feelings of impotence mentioned above made me realise that unless, we who know about immigration detention, do all we can to throw light on the subject and encourage change the government and the private security companies are happy to let it continue in just the same way, each for their own motives. I think 'Refugee Tales' has an answer.





## **Attending an event with Refugee Tales walkers: 'intensely moving, yet inspirational'**

**by Barbara Sutherland**

These were comments heard over and over again, in an event hosted by East Hoathly with Halland Village of Sanctuary in March. People came to hear the personal stories of three refugees who had left their homes and their families to seek refuge and safety in the UK alongside testimony from a volunteer working with refugees in the Aegean. Conversations over tea and cake revealed the resilience and bravery of those who had come to seek sanctuary. The refugees, who had all walked with Refugee Tales, described their journeys that were physical, psychological, and bureaucratic. There was so much shared and so much learned by everyone. Thank you to the Village of Sanctuary. Thank you to the walkers who shared their experiences and all those who organised the event.



## **Refugee Tales 2019: Come and walk with us or attend an evening event.**

**by Katie Close**

The weather has started to improve and we have been out test walking the route for the 2019 Refugee Tales walk. Ignoring the April showers we walk through glades of primroses and cuckoo flowers and along the shingle of the South coast. This really is a walk which should appeal to everyone.

Though the pace is always more of a gentle stroll than an energetic stride it would be wrong to suggest that a certain degree of fitness is not required. We go up and down the South Downs as we make our way out of the vibrant city of Brighton and walk to Lewes on the first day of our walk. Along the way the noise of the seagull drifts away to be replaced by the shrill call of the buzzard high overhead. The following day we set off for Alfriston taking us along the river for the first section, looking out for herons and then climbing back onto the South Downs. The effort of climbing is soon rewarded by magnificent views for miles around of the undulating countryside. We will stop off at Charleston Farmhouse, home of the Bloomsbury Group, and then make our way into Alfriston.

On Monday morning we leave Alfriston and head into Friston Forest, a beech woodland offering welcome shade. After a lunch stop at East Dean village we ascend the dramatic Seven Sisters cliff-top walk and are given our first view of the English Channel with the white cliffs below. As the sheep graze all around us we pass the renowned Beachy Head



before ending in the seafront town of Eastbourne. On Tuesday we leave Eastbourne and walk all day along the coast moving on and off the shingle foreshore to make our way to Bexhill. We may be lucky and see seals along this stretch - we have done on our test walks. The multi-coloured beach huts brighten up the coast line and there should be time to stop for ice-creams.

Our last day takes us inland from Bexhill and to Crowhurst where we stop at a church with a yew tree planted before 1066 and still going strong. The walk is over farm land and alongside marshes eventually leading back to the coast and into Hastings.

Of course the walk is beautiful, the scenery is varied mixing farmland and coastline but on a Refugee Tales walk it is the conversations we have along the way that really matter. Do join us if you can and if walking is not for you, please come along to a free evening event each night along the way. For more details of the walk from Brighton to Hastings, please take a look at our website for more details: [www.refugeetales.org](http://www.refugeetales.org)



## Horrors of home

by **Abdul-Ahad Patel**

*Abdul-Ahad Patel heard of our work through Refugee Tales and made contact with GDWG to discuss our work. We are delighted that he kindly gave us permission to include his poem showing the reality of life in the UK for someone who came to seek sanctuary and encountered hostility.*

My country, my home, my family my friends this is where I belong

School days, playing outside and a thing called safety are long gone

The people are starting to rebel and the police are using violence to respond

My family and I are scared because now the alarms scream down the city streets warning us of bombs

Were told to leave our homes and take essential possessions

As I look back clutching onto my fathers hand our home is now rumble from the destructive weapons

Caught in the crossfire my mother tells me some of our neighbors and friends leave for the heavens

We flee to a departing boat in exchange for our belongings I cry as I'm left with nothing of my home and told to count my blessings

I stay a float amongst the other survivors held close to my parents until we arrive on land

Thirst and hunger threatens our life and I begin to lose grip of my mothers hand She as well as the other dead are thrown into the sea, are we all subject to be damned?

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Days on the water, land on the horizon my  
father drowns saving me as I wash-up  
along the shore with lifeless bodies I can  
barely stand

I awake in an estranged place with  
strangers moving me from house to  
house until I'm settled

The horrors of home still haunt me; they  
say talking will help, but I'd rather not  
meddle

I often think about ending it all, so I can  
be with my family as I pin to my neck this  
sharp piece of metal

But I'm told life will get better don't play  
into the hands of the devil

I go back to school something familiar for  
me but I struggle to communicate  
because of my language

The other students make fun of me and it  
adds weight to my mental baggage

But I pretend I don't understand and this  
broken smile covers my wounds like a  
bandage

Cracks on the surface and missing pieces  
of myself lost, am I permanently  
damaged?

The news reports that the war has  
become worst and there's no way back  
for me I keep hearing people say things  
like go back to your own country

I don't understand why they label me and  
address me with this word, refugee

But I don't feel safe here and the  
definition of that word is someone that  
flees for safety.

## **Writing activism: bearing witness to indefinite immigration detention in the Academy**

**by Avril Loveless**

In February this year, representatives of Refugee Tales were invited to participate in a 'Writing Activism' event at The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities (TORCH), University of Oxford. The event was designed as a workshop, with talks leading up to discussion amongst a mixed international audience of early career researchers, archivists, established scholars, activists, writers, and interested members of the public.

Refugee Tales opened the day with a keynote session, a dialogue between 'Ali Karimi' (pseudonym), who had been detained in Brook House and Avril, his visitor. Ali's Tale had been told in the Refugee Tales collection, and he had also written two pieces describing his experiences of being detained and of participating in the Refugee Tales community.

The dialogue began with a description of the work of GDWG and how Refugee Tales had emerged as a model of outreach for the call for a time limit and an end to indefinite detention. Holding integrity throughout the project demands attention to three threads: the ethical implications of telling people's stories; the use of established writers' talents to offer a deeper sounding and luminosity to the Tales; and the desires of the people held in detention who wished their stories to be known and shared in spaces in which they are not often heard.

Ali and Avril prepared their questions beforehand and discussed some of the key issues between themselves in front of the audience. Ali had written poetry and memoirs in his own languages for some years and shared the process of writing his story, translating it into English himself and then sharing with Avril to check that the power of the points he wanted to make was being expressed. He described the pain of revisiting the experience being balanced by the desire to let people know what it felt like to be detained when he had arrived to seek asylum from persecution. He remembered that while it was difficult to listen to his own stories being told to an audience, he wanted to help the wider project of raising awareness of people's suffering behind the policies. He then read an extract from his tale of detention.

One respondent noted that the authors of the Refugee Tales published collections did not write as if taking and telling another person's story, but wrote about the deeper experiences of meeting and hearing people's stories of detention. People asked Ali questions about the experience of writing, living now with refugee status and how he might write about his hopes and plans for life in the UK. In return, Ali asked them directly why they were studying the humanities, why they had chosen Oxford and how they thought their scholarship might make a difference at different levels, from their personal outlook to political change. These were challenging questions!

The team members at TORCH were very appreciative of Ali's contribution to their discussions and invited him back to another event next year. Refugee Tales continues to be heard and developed by new audiences.

## How I became part of the GDWG team!

*by Mary Sutton*

It seems appropriate that it was someone who had lived experience of being held in immigration detention who first introduced me to GDWG and not the other way around! We had become friends during the time I visited him in an immigration detention centre near Heathrow. He also had friends at GDWG who had visited him when he was previously detained in Brook House.

After his release we agreed to meet up at the GDWG offices before going for a coffee in Crawley since he was attending the first Refugee Tales committee meeting. At this time I was doing research with refugees in London and in particular I was looking at refugees' interaction with church communities. When Anna knew I was coming to Crawley she invited me to join the Refugee Tales committee and from the outset I was very inspired by the project. Since then I have had the privilege of continuing involvement with the Refugee Tales committee and the different facets of the project from the annual walks to the call for an end to indefinite immigration detention.

Fast forward to 2019! At the beginning of the year I started to work part-time with GDWG. My official title is Development Officer and Project Support and I am loving the wide variety of tasks the job involves such as, designing a postcard with emergency numbers and an invitation to join the GDWG walk community that is now given to those released from detention, writing an evidence submission to the ICIBI about

Adults at Risk, designing a new GDWG visitors' leaflet, writing a resource pack for organisers of events inspired by Refugee Tales as well as assisting with a host of tasks that make GDWG work. Moreover, it is a such a joy to work with the fantastic and dedicated team of people at GDWG.

## Refugee Tales Recipe

For many Refugee Tales walkers, looking forward to the excellent catering by ThaiAngle is a big part of getting ready for the walk. And for the team of test walkers, there are additional delights such as the flapjacks baked and brought by Anna Sayburn. We thought you might like the recipe and if you try it out, why not take on your own walks as you build up your stamina for July?

Pecan, date and ginger flapjack  
175g unsalted butter  
1 tbsp treacle (can use syrup)  
150g brown sugar, ideally demerara  
250g porridge oats  
Handful of pecan nuts, chopped  
Handful of dates, chopped  
1 tsp ground cinnamon  
1 tsp ground ginger  
Pinch salt

1. Preheat oven to 180C/gas 4.
2. Melt butter in pan with treacle and sugar on top, stirring as you go (low heat).
3. When butter, treacle and sugar are melted together, stir in nuts, dates, salt and spices.
4. Remove from heat and stir in oats. Mix well and pile into a baking tray, lined with baking parchment and buttered on the sides. (My tray is 17cmx17cm)
5. Flatten gently with back of metal spoon - don't squash it too much.

6. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes, depending on how firm you like your flapjack.
7. Run a knife around it when it's done and mark into squares; leave until cold before removing and cutting into pieces. If they are too soft, stick in the fridge for half an hour to firm them up.

Apparently they keep well in a tin, but they never get the chance on Refugee Tales walks!

## Upcoming Events

- The AGM will take place on 28th May, 7pm at Crawley URC.
- A Walk with Us day walk will take place on 18 May & 8 June.
- Refugee Tales 2019 from Brighton to Hastings is from 5 to 10 July.
- Refugee Tales Volume III will be published by Comma Press in June 2019.
- Local group meetings are on:
  - 24 April - Crawley
  - 30 April - Reigate
  - 4 June - Reigate
  - 16 July - Reigate
  - 8 May - Brighton
  - 20 May - Oxted

2 June - Refugee Tales at the Derby Book Festival.

27 June - Refugee Tales at the Glasgow Women's Library.

3 July - Refugee Tales at the Penzance Literature Festival.

25 July - Refugee Tales at the Feminist Library, London.

Details of events and walks are on the Refugee Tales website.

[www.refugeetales.org](http://www.refugeetales.org)

*Edited and Designed by Eli Barrott*







