

# GATWICK DETAINEES WELFARE GROUP



## GDWG at 25

We thank our visitors for all the good they do supporting people in detention with visits in person and with telephone support. Thank you, too, for your phone support for people who have left detention who are living in destitution. We welcome Josie to our team. Thanks, Josie, for distributing supermarket vouchers from our destitution fund. We have encountered a pandemic of desperation in the Centres where we work and thank our frontline staff for helping people facing forced returns including many victims of trafficking who have recently experienced traumatic journeys to the UK. There is huge strength in us all working together with such focus in spite of the personal challenges we are all facing due to Covid-19.

Anna Pincus  
Director GDWG

## Visiting: October 2020

By Mary Barrett

Brook House, built next to the runway at a strangely silent Gatwick Airport looked oddly different when I arrived there on 1 October following a six month break from visiting. In that time Serco had taken over from G4S as the contractors for the immigration removal centre, identical in design as a Category B prison and capable of housing up to 500 men. Serco was clearly committed to promoting its brand by repainting huge areas of the building. The corporate colour of blood red now dominates doors and massive walls.

The staff were learning new ways of working, both to ensure Covid security and also the Serco way. But there are no queues of visitors waiting to be processed, friends and family, young children all anxiously dropping off suitcases and anticipating their visit with a loved one. Now only two visitors an hour are allowed and due to the changed status of people in detention, few of these men will have a family visit.

However, many of the staff were the same and some greeted me as I was processed. You still go through the six locked doors, but they no longer search you or check your lanyard. But the place is silent and menacing, I was feeling very unsettled as I was ushered into the 'visits' room. This is a large area, usually capable of accommodating around sixteen detainees and their visitors. Now there are two sets of hard white chairs, the person in detention is separated from the visitor by two coffee tables strapped together. The visitor has to wear a face

mask and bright blue plastic gloves, the person being visited is also masked.

What is required of a volunteer visitor to an immigration removal centre? You befriend, support and assure the person in detention that you will spend an hour or so listening to them - you try very hard to give them hope for the future and that their life and well-being is important to you. This is not so easy under the conditions I have just described. You cannot shake their hand, smile, watch their face, hear their soft words. I found this particularly hard when I listened to someone in despair, terrified of being returned to a European country that was intent of sending him back to imprisonment, torture and danger to his family in his home country.

Currently Brook House is being used by the Home Office as a removal centre for those who have arrived on the small boats that cross the English Channel. When they arrive in Kent, they are processed and finger printed then many are sent to redundant hotels or former army barracks where they have no idea what will happen next. Once their finger prints are linked to another European country they are collected by Border Force (usually at night) and driven to Brook House. There they are served with a removal notice which gives five days until the departure and unless they can find a lawyer. They may be victims of torture, human trafficking, seriously mentally or physical ill - they are still removed. Only a lawyer can stop the flight and the immensely dedicated and hard-working immigration solicitors do their very best, but so much is working against them.

However, I did manage to get through my first visit and returned the next week to find a completely different young man, his flight was stopped and he could hope again. He found it extremely hard being in detention, despite all he had experienced in his home country and on his journey, he found 'prison' as he called it so hard. As we visitors have heard many times, he found sleep almost impossible, he had been on suicide watch so was checked all the time. Brook House is very noisy at night. He was happy in the quiet 'visits' room, whereas I found it strange and unsettling. The good news in this story is that he has now been released and will continue to pursue his asylum claim. Life will not be easy but it is so much better than a removal centre. He was detained for forty days.

So, if asked, I will go back to Brook House, it is the very least we can do right now.

## **Phone Visiting**

*By Bob Dare*

For me, and I am sure other GDWG volunteers, the pandemic has meant an unwanted interruption in visiting people in detention. Inevitably they faced increased isolation for several months and the reintroduction of visits into Brook House must have been very much welcomed. Sadly, visiting again is not a sensible option for me at present, so it was great to be introduced to someone who could best be supported by phone.

My first phone call revealed how different phone support from home is compared with being face-to-face in the removal

centre's visits room. To state the obvious, you cannot see the other person! You may never get to know what they look like. You are denied exchanging body-language, which you get when you are face-to-face. You cannot see their facial reaction to what you are saying. You cannot see a smile or judge their mood. You cannot see signs of discomfort. Most importantly it is harder to judge the vulnerability of those we are supporting, especially if they have suffered trauma.

Of course, it works both ways. The person in detention at the other end of the phone must rely on sound rather than sight as he gets to know you and gain confidence in you. If these are disadvantages, however, they are manageable. And on the other side of the coin, there are advantages for the person in detention. He may prefer the greater anonymity of phone contact. He may feel more comfortable without eye contact and scrutiny, which for some can be unnerving. He may feel less embarrassed about his circumstances.

My experience is positive. I very much get the sense that people in detention will appreciate phone contact. They will experience a similar measure of comfort, knowing that someone is taking the trouble to make them feel cared for as they endure their unwelcome and indefinite hardship.

## **A Photographic Friendship Project**

Word of the work of GDWG and Refugee Tales spread to Cumbria, and so we have had the pleasure of developing a photography scheme with members of the Keswick Photographic Society. The scheme began when a kind

photographer sent a handful of framed professional photos to one person in the Refugee Tales community, for him to decorate his accommodation. The recipient soon sent back a video showing the photos up on his walls saying that they were 'very beautiful' and had 'completely changed the house'.

photos of people who have been previously into high resolution pictures. These have been sent back with frames and white tac to be mounted on the walls which is wonderful for those who are far from their loved ones.



The photographer then extended the idea to his photography society, which led to an amazing response from a number of members. So far nine people in the Refugee Tales community have received photos for their accommodation, with more photos in the post. The pictures are brilliant shots, close-ups of animals and stunning landscapes. Some of the photographers have also developed personal family

People who have received the photos have said:

'Absolutely amazing. I love so much'

'They have given me happiness'

'I don't like them but love them so much'

Thank you so much to John, Rosamund and the rest of the Keswick Photographic Society! We are so appreciative of your generosity and friendship.



*Poet Hubert Moore sent this poem for our Refugee Tales community to share on their October Zoom call. Thank you, Hubert.*

## **Ascension**

Can't believe we've sunk so low,  
aspired to such a height  
of caring for ourselves  
and no one else, we even  
think of using a left-over  
of empire, a small volcanic  
island in the Atlantic,  
to build a cage for people  
who came to us for help  
in little boats. Can't believe  
we'd fly them out 4000 miles  
and make them breathe the smoke  
of inhumanity the almost  
spent volcano of us  
sends rising filthily.

Behrouz Boochani's stunning book, 'No friend but the mountains', tells of Australia's use of a remote island for the detention of refugees and of the nature of the torture that can take place in such a place.

## **The Brighton Support Group on WhatsApp!**

*By Dorothy, Co-ordinator of the Brighton Local Support Group*

We decided in May that we would like to find an easy way of keeping in touch during the Covid-19 lockdown. We have continued to have regular meetings using Zoom but not everyone is free to attend the meetings so WhatsApp seemed a good way to complement the meetings and allow us all to share information with

each other. Most people in our group have smart phones but of course using WhatsApp would exclude those who do not.

As the Co-ordinator of the group, I volunteered to get us going and I invited the support group membership to join. Not everyone was interested but out of our current membership of 26, 15 people signed up. This includes two members of the office staff and two office and fundraising volunteers. The rest of us are visitors.

Feeling isolated was one of the hazards of the lockdown and it was especially important for us to keep in touch. We weren't able to visit at Gatwick IRC until very recently but a few of us maintained our support by phone or by Skype with people either at Brook House or recently released. When I looked back at the posts, I was impressed by the variety of issues that have been covered. They include notices of events and links to articles in the press about government policy and the Home Office, about immigration detention, about deportations and about the conditions at Brook House, including news about SERCO who took over the management of Brook House from G4S. We have also told each other about relevant television programmes - both dramas and documentaries. Angie posted links to remind us about BAME people who have died as a result of contracting Covid-19 or through violence in police custody. So we are also linking up to other issues beyond detention. One person used the forum to ask for help and advice and we regularly use WhatsApp to welcome new members. I should reassure any other groups that we have not bombarded

each other with messages - just the occasional post comes through - maybe once a week. People have been very considerate. I personally really appreciate the camaraderie and friendship which we have through the group.

We have to be careful that we don't create a two-tier communication system which would exclude the whole membership so all notices about our meetings are still sent by email to the full list. I am also aware that questions have been raised about the security of WhatsApp. It is linked to Facebook and there are questions about malware, bugs and vulnerabilities despite the end-to-end encryption they claim to have. So far, no one in the group has expressed concern about this as the ease of use and immediacy are strong advantages for the system. However, we have not shared personal or sensitive information about ourselves or the people we visit.

So we are all happy to recommend WhatsApp to other support groups!

### **Meet Josie...**

Josie joined the GDWG team in August, having previously volunteered in the office as part of her MA university placement. At Sussex she researched the mental health of people held in immigration detention and the support offered by GDWG, particularly through visiting and listening. She has a strong interest in migration and has previously written about how the language used by mainstream media outlets about migrants affects integration in the UK, as well as other migration issues including remittances and transnationalism.

Josie volunteered with organisations including Student Action for Refugees, Nightline and Pathways to Independence before joining GDWG. Josie says 'I have loved the first few months at GDWG, getting to know the warm community of Refugee Tales and joining the autumn walks. I am so looking forward to when we are all able to walk as one group again!'



## First walks

*We hold monthly walks for those who have experienced detention and our walking community. All are welcome to join.*

*Parsa joined his first walk in September on a day when we asked everyone participating to send in photos of bridges to demonstrate solidarity and friendship. Here are some of the bridges sent that day:*



Parsa reflects on his first walks:

The first walk was very helpful. Because I am isolated here and am not allowed to

do much it was very helpful and very fun to go outside and talk with someone and walk with someone.

It allows you to discuss different things and say the things you want to say. Especially with someone who knows what you've been through, not just in Brook House but in the past five years. It's a relief honestly to talk and walk and let things out of your chest. It was pretty awesome. Our first walk, I don't remember the name of the area but we went to a high ground and we had a very nice view of London. Our second walk we were in Richmond and we saw deer. So many wild deer sitting in that area, it was so cool to see them. Then we went to some high ground and had another good view of London and relaxed.

## Introduction to the Strategic Public Law Clinic

*By Karen Ashton and Tara Mulqueen*

The Strategic Public Law Clinic is a collaboration between [Warwick Law in the Community](#) (LinC) and the [Central England Law Centre](#). Our aim as a clinic is to take a holistic approach to the law, looking for opportunities to use public law strategically, not just through individual casework, but through research, public legal education and community organising. We want our students to have meaningful experiences of using the law in creative ways to advance social justice.

That's why working with Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group to tackle persistent deficiencies in healthcare services in immigration removal centres was such a good project for us.



Healthcare in immigration removal centres might not seem to most people like a public law issue. However, public law is concerned with how all kinds of public authorities make their decisions and with the processes that underpin those decisions. This might include, for example, how the authorities go about ensuring healthcare in immigration removal centres is equivalent to the service provided in the community. The tools of public law can help to identify and address problems with these processes.

The provision of healthcare in immigration removal centres is a complex issue with multiple providers and contractual arrangements, regulators and overlapping inspection processes. This complexity makes it especially challenging to determine the reasons why there are persistent problems. However, our detailed research has so far revealed a number of factors that may contribute to this problem and we hope this will contribute to the work of GDWG in finding solutions.

<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/applying/linc/>  
<https://www.centralenglandlc.org.uk/>

### **3-Cs Policy**

*By Louise Williamson*

Do you ever get a compliment about GDWG, perhaps from someone you visit? Or do you ever feel like giving a compliment yourself, perhaps about some training you've had, or a member of staff who has been particularly helpful? If you go to our website, you'll see a link to our new Comments, Compliments and

Complaints policy. This revised policy is all about GDWG being an organisation where we value feedback - if someone has a good idea or suggestion, or if something has gone wrong, we want to act on it. And if we've done something right, we want to hear about that too!

Of course, we've always encouraged volunteers to let us know if anything has gone wrong or could be done better - you may have noticed the revised Volunteer Handbook has a new section on "Resolving concerns" instead of a volunteers' complaints policy. But up to now, we've not had a way for anyone outside the organisation to raise a concern about GDWG or to make a complaint. We've plugged that gap with the 3-Cs policy. Please let the office know if anyone you're in touch with is not happy with the service offered by GDWG - if there are problems, we want to get to the bottom of them as quickly as possible and find a good resolution.

And if you ask, "Why bother with a revised policy?" It's very helpful to have a record of the compliments we're paid. We have a new spreadsheet now waiting for positive feedback about what we do well! We know GDWG has been paid many compliments over the years, but perhaps we've been a bit too modest and haven't necessarily made a note of them.

Thank you for your help with this. Do let us know how we're doing! Thanks in advance.

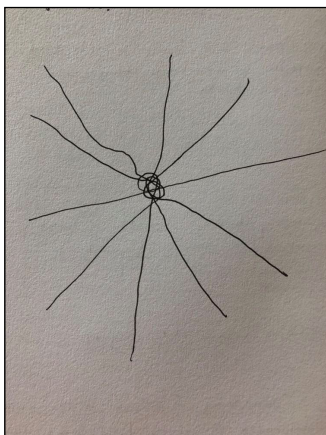
**A poem written for Refugee Tales  
by Canadian poet Stephen Collis:**

**Knot: an Inquiry  
for Refugee Tales**

*'Place' was 'once a knot tied from multiple  
and interlaced strands of movement and  
growth' – Tim Ingold*

We are not  
separate squares  
zooming  
in and out of view  
not isolate nodes  
in networks nor  
discrete quanta of  
statistics votes or  
god help us  
'consumers'

We are a knot  
of traveling strands  
we are the paths  
we travel on the way  
towards one another  
the place where  
we convergewhere  
all our movements  
entangle in the  
beautiful yarn we tell



**Art from Detention**

*Kestutis was in detention and he  
created these pictures. On art,  
Kestutis says, 'It helps stay human  
and to feel the heart of your soul.  
We can be alone with nature and  
save the loving heart.' We feel  
privileged that we have his painting  
in our office. Thank you Kestutis.*



## **Twilight Reflections**

*By Daniel Eichner*

There is nothing better suited to endings than twilight. A mug of hot chocolate, enjoyed in the dusky rays, has brought a symbolic end to more than one period of my life. And if my feelings upon leaving other places, in Brighton, London, or Canterbury; Lebanon, Norway, or Poland; have been bittersweet, then how much more difficult is it to leave a charity as important as GDWG, and a community so supportive and compassionate as ours?

The work at GDWG is, of course, intense, and it took a few months for me to feel confident with what I was doing. This was just in time for the time when several staff left in late 2018. That was a wild time, when scarcely had I finished one phone call and another three people had asked for me. Fortunately, there was light at the end of the tunnel, and within a few months we had recruited more staff, which enabled us to expand GDWG's work.

It was around this time that I felt that bringing on more volunteers to help us would be very beneficial. I ran a recruitment campaign and trained our first group of Advocacy & Support volunteers. They, and their successors, have been absolutely fantastic, each of them bringing different skills, but similar passion. Some of them were studying law, and it is my hope that, in several years, GDWG will work with them again, but that this time they will be some of the good lawyers who we know we can trust with someone's case.

Something else I am pleased with during my tenure here has been the introduction

of bi-annual socials - events during summer and the Christmas period to bring together the wider GDWG community: staff, visitors, trustees, office volunteers, and other supporters. These events have been an enjoyable opportunity to get to know each other better, and though Covid-19 has brought a stop to them, I do hope that they are revived once it is safe to gather together again.

The bulk of my work has always been supporting people in detention, of course. This takes many different forms: from drop-ins to visiting, from giving phone credit and clothes to helping people recover their property from police or prisons. It is the kind of work that comes with a host of wins and losses, often following in quick succession. I still recall with regret - and even grief, in a few particularly unjust cases - those individuals who were removed despite my best efforts. Equally, nothing filled my heart with joy quite like someone being released and having a second chance.

The schools talks programme has always been a welcome break from the intensity of casework. From the very beginning I had incredible support from a team of volunteers, including experienced teachers who were far more knowledgeable than I! As you can probably imagine, going into schools to talk about asylum and detention issues means being faced with a lot of anti-migrant sentiment. This always seemed like a good opportunity to counter bias with facts, and it always felt like a real triumph on those occasions when a student with open and avowed anti-migrant feelings became more tolerant and understanding during our talks.

Facing a political situation where reform of detention seems a distant hope, it is important to remember that political history is the swing of a pendulum, and that at some point the pendulum will swing back and no matter how bad the injustices are today, we generally win on matters of social issues in the end. There was fervent opposition to women's suffrage, and now it is taken for granted. The same applies to free healthcare, gay marriage, and many other issues. There will always be those who oppose new liberties and support continued persecution. But just as the opposition seems insurmountable now, so too seemed the hostility towards women's suffrage, and yet nowadays the suffragettes are celebrated, and their opponents long forgotten.

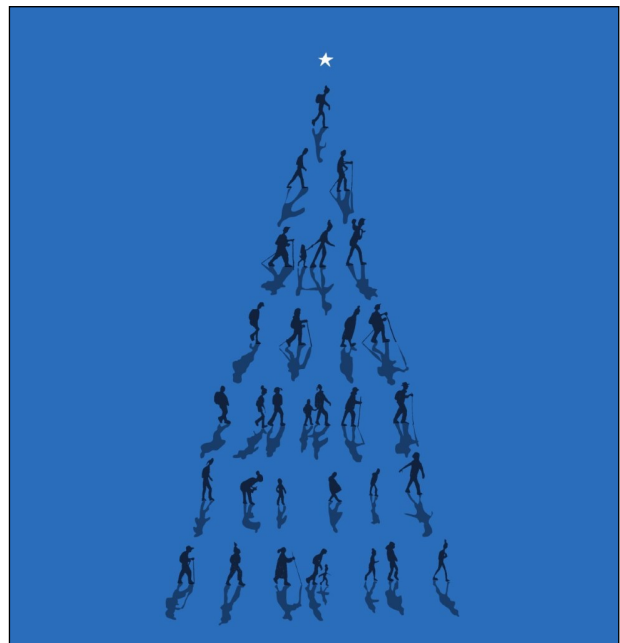
I don't yet know where the open road will take me - only that it is time for me to move on, for I am not one to be content with any one place for long. However, there can be no doubt that I shall at some point return to Sussex, and I would love to continue supporting GDWG and its work. Until we meet again, keep in touch, keep up the good fight, and thank you for all of your kindness, support, and friendship. With love and gratitude, Daniel.

## Walking Tree

Our thanks to Ruby Wright for the beautiful Christmas Card she has designed for GDWG and Refugee Tales this year. On sale now, you'll recognise the colour of the card as the beautiful Refugee Tales blue on our t-shirts! The card shows a community of walkers in silhouette with a delicate Christmas star on top of the tree. Some walkers are

talking together, and all are walking in one direction with a hopeful sense of purpose.

Ruby is an illustrator with a particular interest in picture books. She's worked for BBC Radio 4, Arts Council England and The Architecture Foundation and had radio pieces broadcast in the UK and overseas too. She's currently Artist in Residence at UCL's Plastic Waste Innovation Hub and can often be seen sketch book in hand walking with Refugee Tales. Her website is: [www.rubywright.com](http://www.rubywright.com)



Cards are £4.99 for a pack of 10 plus postage but can be collected from the GDWG office any Wednesday from early November. Please let Josie know how many packs to reserve for you ([josie@gdwg.org.uk](mailto:josie@gdwg.org.uk)) and we'll send you payment details with postage costs. Thanks to everyone who sends the cards for this beautiful design to be enjoyed by many people. Thanks, too, as every card is an opportunity to raise awareness of GDWG and to raise funds for future work.

## EKO Magazine

We love building partnerships and it's been exciting working with Goldsmiths where their STAR group (Student Action for Refugees) has started EKO magazine online - see their website [ekozoneonline.com](http://ekozoneonline.com) EKO magazine states its mission as encouraging reflection on 'current social injustices'. Not surprising, then, that a piece about detention appeared. However, this piece was in Volume 5, a volume entitled 'Hope' and in her article, Mary Barrett reflects on Refugee Tales in a piece that inspires: <https://bit.ly/3oeiGfv>



EKO magazine states its intention as a creative platform for migrants, volunteers and activists and the team write 'We, at ekō magazine, believe that the opportunity to share stories is beneficial in so far as it gives voice to those who

would otherwise go voiceless and it educates those of which only understand a limited portion of the reality of what is happening as a result of those injustices.' We stand by them and have great pleasure in highlighting their work to you. We hope you enjoy reading and sharing Mary's article, and please do follow future editions of Ekazineonline.

## Walking with Refugee Tales

By Lorraine

During National lockdown in March I was very concerned about the safety of all my family, friends and well-wishers.

I sent an email to Anna from Refugee Tales to see how she was doing and so from that day onwards, I've kept in touch with Refugee Tales.

My family enjoyed the Refugee Tales Walk that we did for the first time on Saturday 26th September 2020. My daughter was far too excited about the whole idea, she drew a picture of us all walking on a sunny day.



We walked on a foot bridge that had a beautiful verse which read 'All the rivers run into the sea yet the sea is not full'.

I've suffered for being detained unlawfully in Yarlswood detention centre.

It has had a very awful impact on my mental health and over all wellbeing. There are times when I ask myself " what did I do wrong to deserve detention". It's a place where there is no humanity.

## **Student Experience - Interning**

*By James Furber*

I'm a second-year law student at the University of Warwick. This summer I worked as an intern with the Strategic Public Law Clinic on the healthcare project with GDWG.

At the start of summer, I was worried about how I would get legal experience. So, when this opportunity came along, I knew this internship would be perfect given my passion for public law and social justice. I had volunteered with another SPLC project during my first year and I knew there would be a good working environment, for a worthwhile cause.

Most of my work was focused on examining the differences in approach taken by the regulator (the Care Quality Commission) between inspecting healthcare in detention centres and the system used in community settings.

One specific task involved investigating the use of patient satisfaction surveys. I discovered that in GP inspections, overall ratings tended to be lower when patient experience of the GP assessed the practice below local and national averages. This contrasted with the inspection system used in IRCs; although there is a detainee survey which asks what they think of health care, there is no CQC healthcare rating. This led me to conclude that healthcare providers in

IRCs may not be incentivised in the same way to improve their satisfaction ratings.

I learnt a lot during my internship, including how to get the most from official documents. Authorities seem to generate official documents that are gruelling to read and digest. Over the course of my internship, I have read through hundreds of these documents and learnt to sift through them to get to the sentient points; a skill which I hope will prove invaluable in my career.

## **Meet Raga...**

Raga recently began working as an interpreter with GDWG. She has supported Refugee Tales since 2016 and is wholeheartedly behind the project. She says 'I feel that I am a part of a family. That is what Refugee Tales and GDWG mean to me. It has been a great support for my personal development and has led me to support other human beings who have had to flee their own countries'.



Raga also runs her own charity, Green Kordofan, which runs sport and art activities for children in refugee camps in South Sudan. Green Kordofan is currently on the look out for volunteers to help support their activities, particularly artists and psychologists. If you are interested, please get in touch with Raga at: [greenkordofan@gmail.com](mailto:greenkordofan@gmail.com)

## **An interview with Pious On the Clore leadership course:**

*Pious is part of our parliamentary self-advocacy group of people with lived experience of detention and he recently took part in a Clore Leadership Course. Josie interviewed him about his experience of the course:*

### **Why did you want to take part in the course?**

I wanted to do the course because I want to really equip myself with literacy skills now I have leave to remain. I'm trying to learn more. I've been volunteering for some time with the Red Cross, and it allowed me to learn more about being a leader and taking responsibility in an organisation.

### **What did you do on the course?**

On the course we did a whole lot of modules. For instance, we talked about the changes in the present situation with Covid-19, and how people are adjusting to change. What strategies are leaders coming up with? What challenges is it posing to individuals and organisations? We looked at how people are living their life. The lockdown has changed life for a lot of people. Some people aren't able to cope. As a leader what would you do to help people cope?

### **What ideas did people have?**

People spoke about their personal experiences. How they used to talk to people, but now they are not able to help people as much as they would like to because they are very limited. So looking at that, it has made life very difficult for

people, especially people with mental health issues.

We did talk about workplace experience. We talked about what you can apply, we got coaching strategies. Being a refugee myself, I've had an insight into what it takes. COVID has limited the help you normally get. So we look at leadership development for refugees and migrants in their own sector.

When we go in the breakout groups, we talk about how everyone is a leader but not everyone can be leader. In the sense that, someone else's strategies and personalities contribute to their leadership. We talk about leadership development as a lifelong journey. To lead people, you must be able to manage people. They are they people that are going to help you, you cannot do it all by yourself. You need the people you are leading to be part of the change.

We talked about empowerment of the individual. Good communication. How a good leader is supposed to encourage change. We covered a lot. We did so many practical tasks as well.

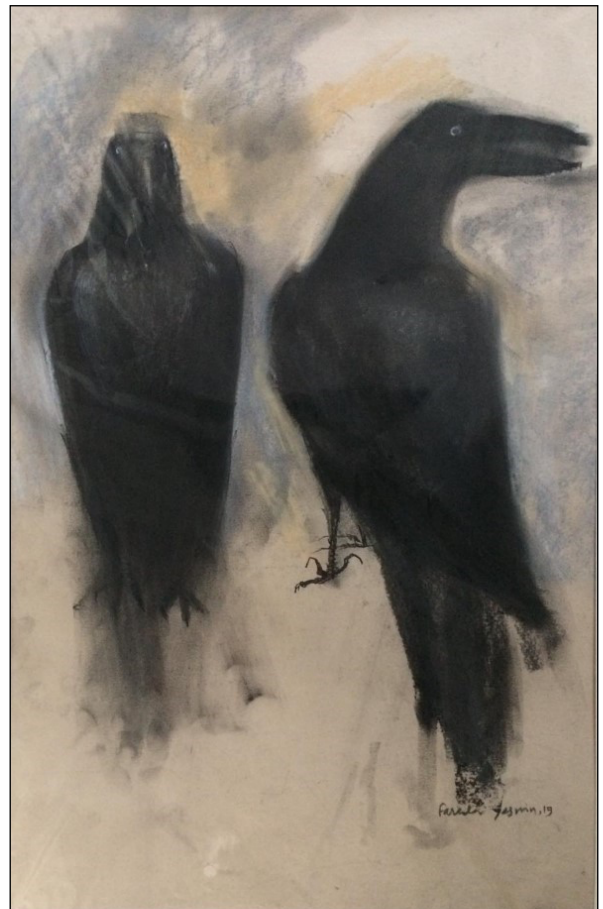
### **How did you feel when you finished the course?**

By finishing I feel more empowered and I can be a good leader. I can be able to manage any role that has been assigned to me. I'm really looking forward. If I have an opportunity, leadership is something I'd really like to take on. I feel I have got a lot more to give. A lot more to learn and give. It's really helped with my confidence so much and it's given me a platform to communicate well with people, and analyse and think quickly for a solution.



### Art work by Farida

*Farida walks with Refugee Tales. She writes: 'I'm a visual artist. I do landscapes outside and life drawing. I also do performance art. Life drawing can be human beings or animals. These landscapes are from Folkestone. The one of ravens I drew at Tower Hill. They keep a lot of ravens there. The Ravens drawing is my favourite' @yesmin\_farida*





## A Hospitable Environment

By Refugee Tales walker, Frances Bell

Last summer, on our final day of walking, Refugee Tales visited St George's Church, Crowhurst. As we entered the churchyard, we passed an ancient Yew tree that has been growing there for more than 1300 years. This tree is split right down the middle, a great yawn where the heartwood should be. Looking into that gap, I was reminded of Peter Randall-Page's Granite Song, which rests discretely on a tiny island in the River Teign. This moss-tossed piece of granite has been cracked open like a nut, and the two sides are carved to reflect each other. Some walkers see an oak leaf, others a walnut, a heart, or a brain. When asked about the sculpture, Randall-Page said that he didn't add anything to the landscape. He simply took the rock from the riverbed and *revealed a space that wasn't apparent before*. And why did he place the sculpture on an island? Because he didn't want walkers to erode the soil, circling the rock and stamping down the cow parsley that grows there in spring. He wanted them to pause.

When you stand on the bank of the Teign, you can watch the water flowing between the granite's separated halves. In autumn, bright red leaves begin to form a bridge between them, and in winter they are joined again by snow. You can feel the seasons pass, the years pass, when you look into such spaces. You can feel the eyes of all those who stood where you now stand, and stared, as you do now, into something open. Something which is gathering its witnesses, those who might speak of it and carry it beyond itself. This

is how I felt when I stared into that beautiful old Yew tree. It is how I now feel about Refugee Tales, pausing to think about the distance imposed between us this year.

Like the gap in the granite, or the open heart of the Yew tree, the pandemic has split us apart, revealing a space that wasn't apparent before. Through that space, we have all caught a tiny glimpse of what it feels like to be confined and severed from loved ones. For those who have faced detention, I imagine the echoes of that experience have been extremely painful. For friends who are still detained, the brutality of their situation has not been tempered by the outside world's analogous lockdown. It has only escalated.

But through that space, we have also been given an opportunity to reflect and to grow. In previous years, Refugee Tales walkers followed the same summer route, hundreds of footsteps joining and deepening a single track. This year, we have taken different paths, our feet lighting up roads that extend the distance between us whilst deepening our understanding of what we are walking for. We have also had time to reconsider what our walks might do. Like Randall-Page's cow parsley, new ideas have been given space to spring up, and now the walking inquiry imbues our monthly walks with greater purpose. It also connects them, linking every walker's path into one worldwide journey towards justice.

So whenever you walk, and in whatever direction, notice the distance between things, all those open hearts. Think of the Yew tree sending its branches and roots deep into the sky and the soil. Imagine

the spaces between us filling with red leaves and bright white snow. Bridge them with memories, the love we hold for each other, the stories we've heard and told, and the questions we are asking. And remember that every step you take brings us closer to the destination we all share: the restoration of a hospitable environment.

## The Shortest Walk

By Jim Howley

Upper Bridge Road is a hill in Redhill. Is Redhill a hill? you might ask, and is it red? A web search will tell you that Redehelde was the name given to a hill with reddish topsoil on an ancient track between Reigate and Nutfield. Upper Bridge Road is a steep residential street from the town up the side of Redhelde.

We've lived at the top for 30 years, so I know it well. About 350m long, it's loved or loathed by the residents depending on whether they're at the top (some lovely views) or climbing after a hard day's work. It's easily underestimated. One day a few years ago, I was starting the climb on my bike; a passing downhill walker caught my eye and said with a smile of encouragement 'Big ol' 'ill'.

For the last 8 months I've been taking every chance I can to sit out in our front garden. I found myself unexpectedly with more than enough 'time to stand and stare'. Except that, as you see from the picture, I wasn't standing, I was sitting in a wheelchair waving to passing neighbours or strangers.

A year ago, I was extremely unlucky. I found myself in the tiny proportion of knee patients who develop a serious



post-op infection. Ten weeks in hospital, four more ops and months of rehab, not to mention the pandemic, invaded my life. With the help of my wonderful family and so many amazing professionals I reached a point in that wonderfully healing summer when I could envisage walking without aids.

'Set yourself achievable challenges' is a mantra my Physios reiterated. What if I try to walk up our hill? I mused sipping an aperitif with my wife in the garden. It's a very short for a walk but for me that's a mighty challenge. I let the idea simmer. Shortly after, in a GDWG update from Anna, appeared another mantra: #WalkingForHumanRights. It was an invitation from Refugee Tales to participate in a nationwide local walk challenging the mindset behind the Home Secretary's conference speech about immigration. I registered my 'hill walk' on our website thinking 'I bet this is the shortest walk on the list'.

Saturday 17th was a mild October day as I took up my station at the bottom of the road. Family members and friends joined in the countdown to 12.30 when I handed my walking stick to my grandson and,

taking the middle of the road, made my first steps for over a year up our hill.



What followed was a mini street festival, as neighbours and their children came to their gardens to join in the fun, many following up behind. It's a rare day that our hill sees so many smiling faces on its

upward slope. And there, halfway up, beaming, was our own Anna Pincus with her mother and daughter.

As the hilltop came in sight a car coming down pulled up and out jumped Shiv, the landlady of The Garibaldi, our community pub, carrying a large jug of ale and a pint glass. The last 100m have never been such sweet walking.

A short Saturday stroll up Redehelde; £450 generously donated to Refugee Tales; smiles all round. A nice way to round off a hard year.

## Report review 'Covid-19 Impacts on Immigration Detention: Global Responses'

By Mary Sutton

GDWG is a member of the International Detention Coalition (IDC) that recently collaborated with the Humanitarian and Development Research Initiative (HADRI) at Western Sydney University to produce a report exploring the multiple impacts of COVID-19 on migrant communities around the world including rapidly changing immigration detention practices. This edited collection provides a platform for IDC members and partners to reflect on and share experiences, actions and perspectives as the pandemic unfolded. In the contribution from the UK by Ali McGinley (AVID) and Mishka Pillay (campaigner and writer with lived experience of detention), GDWG visitors and staff will recognise all too well the difficulties faced by people in immigration detention during the pandemic - difficulties that continue to impact the health and wellbeing of those detained as well as those released and living in the community.

The report reminds us the ongoing struggle for human rights and dignity for people seeking refuge and safety across borders is not limited to the UK, but neither is the call for justice limited to the UK. It is encouraging for GDWG to be part of an international collaboration like the IDC that advocates for an end of immigration detention. Refugee Tales, too, has been enriched by the input of international friends in Canada, US, Australia, Italy and beyond. Those who took part in this year's Refugee Tales online event will recall Behrooz Boochani's first-hand experience of Australia's offshore detention regime<sup>2</sup>. Platforms for sharing experiences and for reflecting on responses such as this IDC/HADRI report continue to be important for achieving the shared vision for 'a world where immigration detention no longer exists and people who migrate live with rights and dignity'.

It seems a fitting way to end this piece is with the first words of the report - words which are in the form of a poem by someone with lived experience of immigration detention.

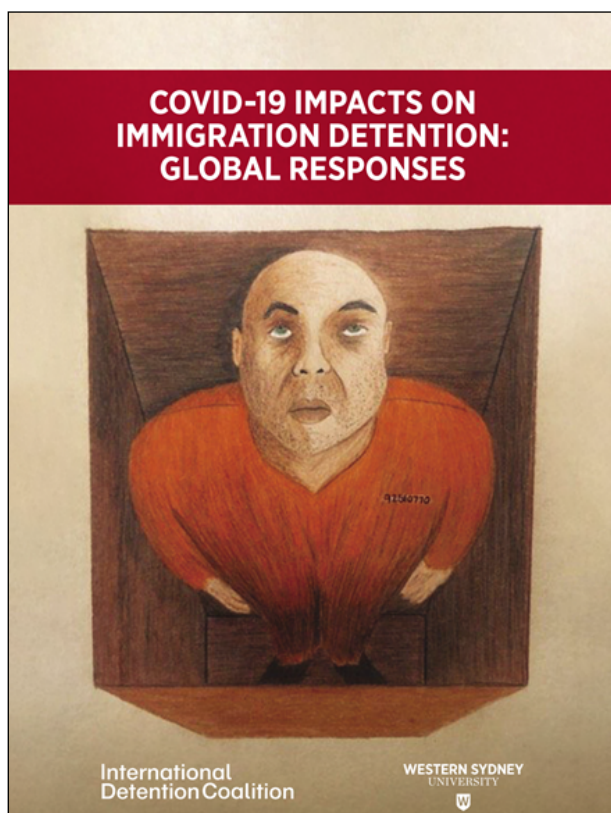
### *'I Refuse'*

by Anthony Miranda

Deprived of family and friends  
Confined by iron stone walls  
They feed me fear, anger darkness, and hate.  
So now I live without tears.  
Who understands me when I say I refuse to give into darkness?  
I refuse to give up because of the pain they have inflicted on me.  
I refuse to let the anger control me.  
I refuse to act on the hatred they forced upon my heart.

And I refuse to let these iron stone walls consume my soul.

Sincerely, "Human"



### Remote Supporters

By Sue Hofsteede

Six of us in North Wales recently started Refugee Tales Cymru, with the intention of organising a walk locally next summer in solidarity with asylum-seekers and refugees and in association with Refugee Tales.

It will be a 1-day walk, a gathering and a tale told, delivered through whatever means may be in place at the time because of Covid-19 restrictions.

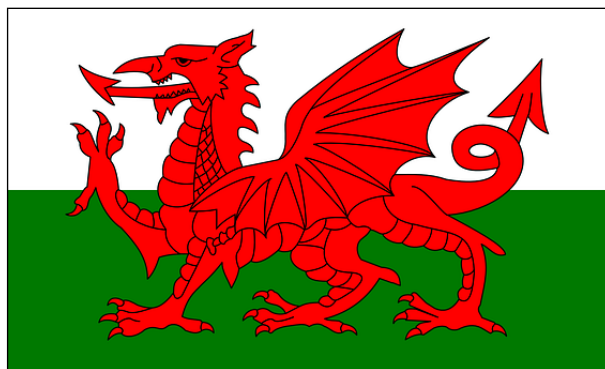
We have all been interested in the Walking Inquiry but wondered whether this was really for us. If I'm honest, I had the feeling that I lack authenticity. Partly this is because none of us has been a

visitor or inside a detention centre. There are no detention centres in Wales although at Penally in Pembrokeshire, a former army training camp has recently been turned into highly unsatisfactory accommodation for asylum seekers (insanitary, overcrowded and trauma-reinforcing because of its military nature). There are some refugees living here, around Bangor, but they are mainly members of Syrian families who have come via the UN resettlement programme. Catherine is a core member of Croeso Menai, which was about to welcome a family through the Government's Community Sponsorship scheme when lockdown arrived. Hardly anyone here has experienced the UK's detention system. On our walk next summer we may be (re)telling a tale from outside Wales rather than the tale of someone living among us.

Nevertheless, we are keen to link with you, to and bring refugee tales to North Wales and to engage with the Walking Inquiry. The abhorrent practice of indefinite detention is being carried out in our names wherever we live and whatever our lack of direct, personal experience. As Evelyn pointed out, the very fact of our apparent remoteness from detention centres and detainees can lead to an attitude that it's nothing to do with us; it's someone else's problem. This alone is reason enough to do something to raise people's awareness here of what is being perpetrated elsewhere in our names and invite them to join the call for an end to it. Finally, Marieke put it this way: "Once I became involved with the Refugee Tales walks it became not a choice to turn away and ignore what's happening in the UK.... This is a matter for all of us to be aware of and share with

each other. Once we have heard these tales we cannot 'unknow' and do nothing. It is just not an option."

I feel nervous about whether we'll do justice to the cause and live up to the high standards set by Refugee Tales but we have the invaluable support of Anna and colleagues. Felly, dymunwch y gorau i ni ('so, wish us well' - Anna's learning Welsh, in case you didn't know).



## How I am defined

*By Souleyman*

Souleyman has been supported by GDWG. He doesn't wish to be defined by his detention:

I started volunteering for Right to Remain when I moved to Manchester. Before that I was doing some volunteering in London with the Wallace Foundation. With Right to Remain, I volunteer at the the Inspire café in Levenshulme. I volunteer every Thursday from 2-6pm. I drop shopping to people and chat with them. I do lots of cooking and make foodstuffs for destitute asylum seekers.

During the lockdown, only six people were allowed in, socially distanced. I still volunteered. I cooked there, made soup in the kitchen. We provide them with meals, and they love it.

I chat to them. They asked how I knew about cooking. It was through my time in detention. I worked in the kitchen. I cooked in the cultural kitchen, which was open every two weeks and where you can cook food from your own country. They saw that I can cook and then I cooked in the kitchen. Now we are allowed more people than at the beginning of Covid-19. They have made the space bigger. I enjoy when everyone comes together. At the beginning no one was talking, until I explained my experience. You meet a lot of people there, all talking about their experiences now. We have good communication. We started a group WhatsApp, where we share information for new people and share ideas. I love to go there. I make friends and they said I cook very well. My favourite thing to cook is Jollof rice, I love it too much! I cook it with just vegetables, most people here are vegetarian. Yesterday we made soup with bread and butter. I also make really good peanut butter sauce which is good with white rice and chicken. Or you can have it with couscous.

## **Student Experience - Visiting Brook House and Tinsley House**

*By Kate Williams, Amin Aziz, Freya Middleton*

As part of our work with the Strategic Public Law Clinic and GDWG this year, we visited Brook House and Tinsley House IRCs. Visiting an immigration removal centre shaped our perspective on the project considerably. Ultimately, this is because the visits allowed us to put a human face to the numbers quoted in various reports we'd read. Talking to someone living in detention brought to

life some of the struggles we had heard about. It helped us to understand that the people we are supporting with this project each have their own stories and experiences. It was striking to see people whose lives had suddenly been reduced to the detention environment, particularly in the high security Brook House. This has left a lasting impression.

Our task focused on investigating the access to and quality of healthcare that detainees were receiving. However, when visiting the detention centres, we realised that many other aspects of detention affect detainees. For example, Brook House's proximity to the airport can heavily impact the mental health of detainees, because the sound of persistent planes flying overhead provides a constant reminder that they may be deported at any time.

Visiting the detention centre motivated us when it came to the project. Having a better understanding of what it is like to be a detainee and talking with the people that are affected by healthcare issues, meant we could appreciate why projects like this are so important. The fact that we might be able to assist in improving the healthcare system for people in the detention centres we visited, and for those detained elsewhere in the country, is a real motivator for being invested and thoughtful in our contributions to this project.

## **Walking in Derbyshire**

*By Jill Day*

We have just started walking with you each month, in solidarity, from Belper Derbyshire. For us, the walks are a time

to learn and share what each of us has discovered about immigration detention since last together. For although we would probably consider ourselves as pretty well informed, we really had no idea what was actually going on, how inappropriate and intentionally cruel the system has become.

During the past 3 years I have had asylum seekers living with me when they hit the destitute phase of the process, and I have seen how they are treated by the Home Office. This hosting stopped when the government announced that everyone needed to be indoors and many were put into hotels. Food, shelter and safety I naively thought. The tragic events at the Park Inn hotel in Glasgow led me to start enquiring about the conditions in which people were effectively being detained during the pandemic. This, in turn, led me to you - the GWDG and to Refugee Tales.

I ordered all 3 books and read them straight through. At times I couldn't go on but I couldn't stop either. The books have such an impact and take the reader to a completely new level of understanding. My friends read them too and reacted similarly.

It's such a good idea to have the monthly walks wherever they can take place. They provide a regularity and focus to our discussions and link us to the campaign. We're not yet walking with anyone who has experience of detention so we can only share what we're learning and our views on that. We like you setting us questions for the walk!

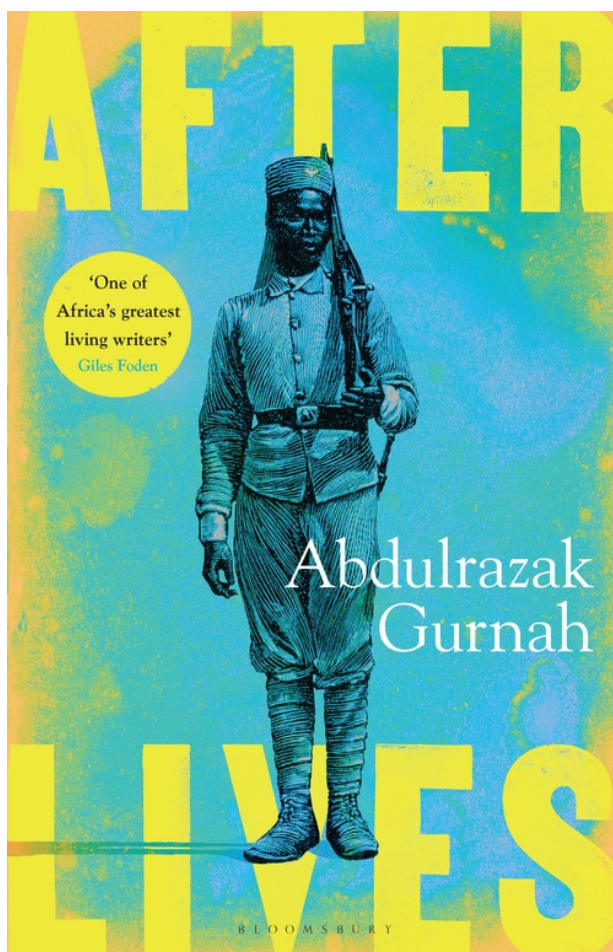
Social distancing, combined with the loss of hearing, makes it difficult to discuss as

a group when walking. So we walk, talk and then have a plenary session around a table in an ice cream parlour... This is a social enterprise run to support people who have been trafficked, so we feel it's a legitimate, and essential, part of our walk!

### Book Review:

#### ***Afterlives by Abdulrazak Gurnah***

*By Mary Barrett*



Afterlives, Abdulrazak Gurnah's latest novel is set in Tanzania in the first half of the last century. I found it compelling because at its heart it is a series of great stories. None of the four main characters has an easy start in life, loss, neglect, violence and cruelty mark their childhood. The four are linked throughout the novel and somehow

survive to find love and hope in their own ways.

Ilyas is stolen by the colonial army, the *Schutztruppe*, and returns to his village to rescue his sister Afiya. Khalifa is mixed race, Indian and African, and is compelled by his father to leave his village to return just once to bury him. Hamza is sold as a child, abused then, and as an adult suffers terribly fighting for the Germans.

The background is colonial Africa in the twentieth century. Since Germany was stripped of its colonial possessions after the First World War, its legacy as a coloniser has been discussed less frequently. The German Empire once included Namibia, Rwanda and Burundi, Togo, Cameroon and of course Tanzania and at beginning of the century it was busy brutally quelling revolts and subsequently fighting the British in East Africa. The *Deutsch-Ostafrika* army in Tanzania recruited or pressed local men as *askaris* to fight their battles and suppress their fellows. The regime was brutal; the lives of the askaris and the carriers or porters counted as nothing.

The greater part of the book is set in an unnamed town on the Tanzanian coast and the life of the town and its inhabitants are at its heart. Of course, their lives are affected by external events, they get by, maybe by doing more illicit trading when times get hard but basically they keep going. This town comes alive through storytelling, the reader sees and in particular, smells the wood yard, the docks and the busy streets, the evenings spent gossiping on the porch drinking coffee and the evening walk to the mosque. One gentle, small part character is Mzee Sulemani, the master carpenter who spends his lunch breaks

embroidering caps. Abdulrazak Gurnah's prose is spare and rhythmic, impeccably researched and always with compelling storytelling at its heart.

Abdulrazak Gurnah has been part of Refugee Tales since we set out in 2015. He has written two tales, the first 'The Arriver's Tale' is in Book 1 and the follow up 'The Stateless Person's Tale' is in Book 3. He is, with Ali Smith, one of our patrons.

Afterlives is published in hardback (and Kindle) by Bloomsbury.

## Beauty in the Wild by Chris Orange

A review by John Barrett



There are 42 truly stunning, wonderful photographs in this 7 inch square book - oh and one more picture on the cover.

I first went to Scotland to the Highlands many years ago and heard 'The Road to the Isles' sung with gusto. Chris Orange might well sing that '*the far Cuillens are putting love on me*' as he is plainly been struck by the rough, wild beauty of the



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Isle of Skye with a special attraction to the Cuillen mountains themselves.

There are many more photographs of the west of Scotland, the outer islands with Barra, Vatersay, Tiree, Lewis and Harris among them.

These are images of serious quality, taken with love and care to capture the wonderful varied and changed-by-light and sky, landscape of some of Britain's most remote places.

There are pictures of other out of the way places apart from Scotland. Those from Lindisfarne are special: atmospheric, tranquil and full of calm. Lundy and the Welsh coast are there too.

Chris has added short explanatory notes about each photograph.

So do I have a favourite? Well though I hate the cold, a stark bright winter scene of hikers descending the Old Man of Storr on Skye is one from a host of very memorable scenes.

Now folks it is payback time.

Chris Orange is a great photographer, and a generous supporter of Refugee Tales. His images of Refugee Tales walks are among the most used and he takes not a penny for his work.

Beauty in the Wild is available here; <https://beautyinthewild.click/>

## **Letter from a Refugee Tales walker**

*By Rosalinda Maog MMS*

Warm greetings! I hope all is well with each of you and your family especially

during this COVID-19 pandemic time, now on the second wave.

It was really great to have walked with you today and joined you in the zoom session this evening. I am so pleased to have seen most of you who have been part of my journey here in the UK. Surely I will miss seeing you and having a conversation on the walk.

Thank you Mary for sharing your current experience of visiting detention during this COVID-19 pandemic time. It would not be easy to reach out to our friends the way we used to. However, I thank you for your passion and commitment in accompanying them as it may be most challenging at this moment.

I am grateful and can take pride how Refugee Tales has journeyed and flourished for the past 6 years. It was a great opportunity and privilege to be part of your journey. I continue to support your hard but joyful creative and collective efforts in engaging with the people whom you commit to lobby for change (#endindefinitetimeindetention) in our society and continue to create a community of welcome (not a hostile environment). I salute each of you who made this possible especially in supporting and improving the lives of those who were made marginalised by the system in the UK.

Well dear friends, I am awed and honoured to say that I had been here, connected and in solidarity with all of you who made my life in mission in the UK invaluable and fruitful. You have supported me so much in the mission involvement I had with the forced migrants and created and built wonderful

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relationships with each of you and the entire RT community. Maraming Salamat po! (Thank you very much!)

I simply wish to let you know that my time to leave the UK has been definite and confirmed on 3rd December 2020. I will be finishing all my mission involvements on the 13th November 2020 to prepare for my mission closure before I leave for the Philippines.

So I wish to take this space and time to say how splendid, magnificent, happy, hopeful, affirming and tireless is my journey with Refugee Tales. I will bring in my heart your beautiful faces, stories and memories I could remember and cherished in my whole lifetime. Thank you for bringing so much joy, fun, care,

kindness and compassion in my journey. I am sending you all my best wishes and blessings to all that you are and all that you do with good health, well-being, love, hope and safety.

Please find a memoir group photo of Medical Mission Sisters from the RTWalk 2019. Many, many, many thanks. 😊





