

[Together]

NEWS FROM JRS UK SPRING 2018



“It made me feel like there are still good people out there. They showed me acceptance and love... unconditional love”

Guest of JRS Hosting



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Detention Outreach: Caring for detained asylum seekers

Beatrice Grasso reflects on the realities of being detained and describes how visiting detainees can be action enough in itself.

It is hard to imagine what it must be like to be incarcerated, to be constrained in an enclosed space for days on end, surrounded by walls and locked doors, deprived of even the simplest of choices: what to eat, when to sleep, whom to see. It is even harder to imagine what that same experience must be like when the reason for being there in the first place is unclear, and when there is no clear end in sight.

Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs), as they are officially known, are technically not prisons, but you would be forgiven the easy mistake. They certainly look like prisons, with their high walls and barbed wire fences; and they feel like prisons, with their strict regulations and regular lockdowns. Yet, most of the people who are detained there have committed no crime, and none of them know how long it will be before they are let out.

As in most other countries, this is made possible in the UK due to the existence of a system of administrative detention: this means that certain people, because of their immigration

status, can be effectively imprisoned without trial, because it is expected that they will be soon returned to their country of origin. What sets the UK apart from the rest of Europe is the fact that this is the only country that does not have a statutory time limit on immigration detention. As a result, while some people will only be detained for a few months, others are detained for years before being eventually released back into the community, their detention having served no purpose at all.

Incredulity, denial, despair: these are extremely common reactions among the men JRS UK visit as part of our work of Detention Outreach in the Heathrow IRCs. Many men struggle to understand why they have been detained, certain there must have been some mistake. As the months roll by, however, that possibility seems less and less plausible, and several of them start developing increasingly negative thoughts, their physical and mental health often deteriorating noticeably.

“Why they locked me up? I am no criminal, no thief, no murderer, but they put me in prison.”

Quote from a refugee friend in detention

In the bleakness of their situation, they often find very little to hold on to, as their “normal” lives outside detention fade into distant memories, family and community ties are strained to breaking point, and faith in the system is shattered. It is here that our dedicated team of volunteers attempts to bring back some light in their lives, some consolation in their despair. With a very limited range of possible actions at their disposal, volunteers do the only thing they can: be present.

Accompanying these men during one of the most difficult times in their lives is a challenging task, as our own helplessness and frustration build up, and the desire “to do something” often grows uncontrollably. In this moment, a small miracle takes place, as with great generosity our friends in detention remind us of the power of our being there. It is interesting to note this passage of Matthew’s Gospel: “I was in prison and you came to see me” (Mt 25, 36).

“It does not read: I was in prison and you helped me get out. Nor: I was in prison and you solved my immigration case. No, the only action required is a visit.”

What seems like a small, insignificant gesture in front of the suffering of captivity is actually a powerful display of love. It is showing, in deed and not only in words, that we care about this person as an individual, as a human being. It means recognising that they are not forgotten, that someone is ready to stand by them, no matter what. It gives them something to look forward to in the timeless void of detention, someone to rely on when all other reference points have disappeared. It restores some of the lost hope, theirs and ours alike, that someday the immigration detention system will be only a bad memory.

GET INVOLVED: *if you feel inspired to action by Beatrice’s words, we’re recruiting now for new visitors into detention. If you’re interested and would like to learn more, please e-mail detentionuk@jrs.net*

NEWS

“How many times a day do you say ‘yes, but’?”

Fr Tomas H Smolich SJ, International Director of JRS reflects on how often our sisters and brothers who are migrants and refugees hear ‘yes, but’ more than the rest of us.

Read more at: www.jrsuk.net/news

BLOG

“Pope Francis’s Message of Hope is a call to holistic love in action, ... a love that encounters people as they are, in all of their human dimensions, ... It is a call to a deep and reciprocal hospitality.”

Fr Damian Howard SJ, Provincial of the Jesuits in Britain, shares his reflections on the gifts of offering deep hospitality to Migrants and Refugees.

Read more at: www.jrsuk.net/blog

Opportunity to learn and develop

Megan Knowles reports on a recent training event for detention outreach volunteers and how JRS support detention visitors.

Our friends at AVID (the association for visitors to immigration detainees) delivered a training session for JRS UK volunteers at the end in January. The training covered current issues in detention, focusing especially on recent changes in legislation, and provided an overview of the rights of people held in immigration detention, concentrating on key issues such as access to healthcare and legal advice.

Volunteers were given a space where they could test crucial skills in a safe environment, trying their hand at active listening and asserting boundaries through hands-on exercises and role plays. Central to the day was a session on looking after oneself and supporting each other as a group.

It was a great day of learning together. Beatrice Grasso, JRS UK Detention Outreach Manager said of the training, "We are very grateful to AVID for agreeing to deliver this training to our volunteers and sharing their expertise with our team.

"Detention outreach work is demanding, both emotionally and in terms of the knowledge that is needed in order to accompany in the best possible way all those who come in contact with JRS UK. It is therefore crucial to us that our volunteers are provided with the tools necessary to serve these young men to the best of their abilities, and at the same time receive all the support they need to enable them to continue doing so in the long term."



Anita Whitehouse, JRS UK volunteer said, "I feel like I now have a better understanding of the many issues facing our friends in detention, in particular around the mental health. As a visitor, I now feel more confident in being able to recognise signs of vulnerability and respond to them."

GET INVOLVED: Would you like to volunteer with JRS UK as a detention visitor? We're recruiting now for new visitors into detention. If you're interested and would like to learn more, please e-mail detentionuk@jrs.net

Out in the Cold?

In January, JRS UK published our first report, "Out in the Cold: Homelessness among destitute refugees in London".

The report uncovers a widespread pattern of sporadic street homelessness affecting men and women of different ages and backgrounds, who had fled to the UK for safety and sought asylum, but struggled to gain recognition of their status as a refugee. Sophie Cartwright explains more and what you can do to help.

Out in the Cold is based on research carried out in our Day Centre amongst our refugee friends, to give them a chance to speak about their

experiences, and to give us a fuller picture of the reality of the situation they are facing.

The research uncovered a troubling reality. Large numbers of our refugee friends live in precarious and unsafe accommodation, constantly aware that they could end up on the streets with no notice. Most of those who took part in our survey had slept rough within the last year. How does this happen? Many couch surf, going from friend to friend. Sometimes a couch doesn't materialise,



so they sleep on a park bench or night bus instead. Additionally, destitution and homelessness are forcing refugees into volatile situations. One woman told us, "abuse is common and somewhat expected." Around a third of those we spoke to were actually afraid of those they lived with – but they had no choice, they have nowhere else to live.

This horrible situation is not an accident. It happens because the government intentionally makes people destitute. The asylum system is notoriously unfair; many of those initially refused asylum are ultimately granted it, as we see time and again with those we accompany at JRS. This means that the government denies people international protection, then it finally acknowledges they need it. So what happens to people whose asylum claims are refused, but who can't leave because they are in fear for their lives if they do? Policy-makers create what they term a 'hostile

environment' for people in these circumstances. Not allowed to work or access any support, and increasingly barred from basic services like healthcare, these refugees find themselves trapped, forced into the kind of situations we learnt about in the survey.

This needs to change. To help make this happen, JRS UK is inviting communities across the UK to join us in calling for:

- The legal right to work, for all asylum seekers and 'refused' asylum seekers, for as long as they are in the UK
- Readily available and adequate support, sufficient to allow people to live with dignity, in the event that it is not possible for them to work
- An end to the hostile environment agenda

FIND OUT MORE: A two-page briefing and the whole report can be downloaded at jrsuk.net/out-in-the-cold

Busting the myths surrounding immigration detention

"Detention centres are exclusively for people who have committed a crime"

FALSE

Even though they are built following prison standards, detention in an immigration removal centre is administrative rather than criminal. This means that the initial decision to detain someone in one of these centres is taken by a civil servant, and not by a judge.

"Immigration detention only affects a small number of people"

FALSE

At any one time, around 3,000 people are being held in the immigration detention estate around the UK. In the year ending September 2017, almost 28,000 people entered immigration detention. This includes both men and women, some of whom were eventually recognised as victims of torture or trafficking in human beings, or particularly vulnerable due to a disability or mental health issues.

"There is no time limit on how long a person can be held in detention"

TRUE

The UK is the only country in Europe without a statutory time limit on immigration detention. This means that under UK law there is no maximum length of time that a person can be held in an immigration detention centre. Several groups and organisations, including JRS UK, find this highly problematic, because it essentially leads to people being deprived of their liberty without having necessarily committed any crime, without a trial, and without having had a judge review this decision.

At the end of September 2017, the longest recorded length of detention was 1,845 days, in excess of five years.

FIND OUT MORE: read more about immigration detention, who is detained and why at www.jrsuk.net

Journey with refugees this Lent

What does Lent mean to you? JRS UK invites you to journey with refugees this Lent.



Quasi is one of the refugees we journey with this Lent. Here is Quasi at a reception centre in Athens, having travelled across land and sea in search of safety and security.

Image ©Darrin Zammit Lupi/JRS Europe

Lent is a time of repentance and renewal for Christians, and we often do this through a mixture of almsgiving, fasting and prayer. Often this takes the form of giving something up – like chocolate, or cake. Perhaps it's about doing something extra – like starting volunteering as a befriender or making more time to visit family. But Lent is also a time of journey – a journey of recommitting ourselves to Jesus.

This Lent, we invite you to enter into a Lenten journey with the Jesuit Refugee Service UK (JRS UK) and walk alongside some of the refugees whom we work with. JRS UK will be producing daily reflections throughout Lent, which will be sent straight to your inbox.

Everyday during Lent, the e-mail will offer reflections on Scripture from the day – either from the Mass Readings or from the Office of Readings – alongside an action to support your Lenten observances.

Across the weeks we will follow the experiences of a number of the refugees JRS accompanies, and have prayerful reflections from Jesuits, including Mike Smith SJ and Sr Rachel Riordan. Through their stories, the Lenten daily e-mails will provide an opportunity for you to journey with refugees and with scripture, inviting you to enter into a space of accompaniment.

GET INVOLVED: You can catch-up with the previous weeks e-mails and subscribe to receive the e-mails in your inbox at www.jrsuk.net/lent



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

London Marathon: support our runners!

22 April 2018

Refugee Week 2018: 20 ways to celebrate

18–24 June 2018

Watch this space for JRS events happening and check-out www.refugeeweek.org.uk for events happening near you.

Refugee stories: changing the narrative Wednesday 20 June 2018

This conference will be the fruit of a unique collaboration between the Heythrop College and JRS UK, bringing together academics working in theology and related disciplines, practitioners serving refugees, and - most importantly - those seeking asylum themselves.

Conference: 9.30am–5pm

Service of Words and Music organised by Heythrop College, continuing the theme of outcast:
6pm–7pm followed by reception

Location: Heythrop College, University of London, Kensington Square, London W8 5HN

Bookings and more information:
www.heythrop.ac.uk/events/refugee-stories-changing-narrative

Support us

Help JRS continue to ensure refugees find a place of welcome and protection.

Ways to donate

Online: www.jrsuk.net/donate

By cheque/postal order made payable to:
Jesuit Refugee Service UK sent to
**JRS UK, 2 Chandler Street,
London, E1W 2QT**

Keep in touch

Have an idea to support JRS' fundraising? Want to have a speaker at your church or school? Interested in learning more about our work? Get in touch!

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