

BID South, (Bail for Immigration Detainees) works very closely with Haslar Visitors Group. Their Coordinator is a Haslar Visitors Trustee, eight of the 13 local volunteers are or have been members of the Visitors Group. We have offices in the same building.

39% of BID South clients released

In the last year 169 of 434 BID South clients were granted release from detention, 70 more than in the year before.

This is a fantastic result given that our clients are now almost exclusively ex-foreign national prisoners who have been detained on completion of their sentences. The detention of this group appears to have become automatic and without any real consideration being given to the risks of absconding or re-offending.

We have increased our efforts to get temporary admission (freedom without having to go to court) for detainees and are encouraging both detainees and solicitors to ask for this themselves. We are encouraging detainees to list more of their own bail applications using our do-it-yourself guide. These strategies have paid dividends.

The cases below illustrate the problems the detainees face.

A- Was an asylum seeker from Zimbabwe. His refugee status was revoked when it was discovered he had not told the Home Office he had been in the UK before. He had a settled address, strong support from family, and 2 good sureties. He also had an appeal outstanding and had been assessed as low risk to the public and of re-offending. At no time during his detention was he removable, due to the suspension of returns to Zimbabwe that was in place at the time. Despite having such a strong case for release the Home Office continually opposed bail and he was detained for 12 months before getting bail.

The failure to consider release at the end of a prison sentence is often the last straw for family and friends who were waiting to be re-united. Relationships break down under the strain and sureties give up after making repeated appearances in Court. On top of the extra trauma this causes the detainee, they are also left facing the uphill battle of trying to gain release with no firm address or close ties that will support them.

B- Is an Eritrean that we helped with bail last year. The Home Office refused his asylum claim and he claimed again in a different name. For this he received a prison sentence and 11 months in detention. The Home Office did all they could to deport him. We have since learned that B has been granted refugee status after lodging a fresh asylum claim. The criminal conviction and all the hardship was a direct result of a very poor initial decision.

C- Is an Iraqi asylum seeker. He spent over a year in detention despite the fact that enforced removals to Iraq were not taking place due to the poor security there. We got him bail in June 2007, but he was re-detained in January 2008. The Home Office claimed it was for imminent removal even though that was not possible. When this argument failed they tried to accuse him of causing a disturbance, which was also not true. A Judge granted bail again but immigration at the detention centre refused to release claiming that there was no management at the Centre to sign the form. After a struggle he was released late the next day.

Frances Pilling

BID Coordinator and Haslar Visitor Group Trustee