

# The Detention Forum



## A Compassionate and Practical Alternative to Immigration Detention

Parliamentary Briefing

January 2024

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This briefing focuses on a Home Office funded community based alternative pilot run between June 2020 and June 2022 by [King's Arms Project \(KAP\)](#)

### Key findings from the pilot:

In August 2023, UNHCR [published](#) an independent evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the pilot and found that:

- The person-centred approach delivered through caseworkers enhanced the well-being and self-esteem of pilot participants;
- The pilot was cost-effective. It would have been **66% more expensive** for participants to have been detained.
- The combination of holistic casework and legal advice provided pilot participants with the essential stability needed to actively engage with complex immigration issues;
- Many participants reported that they had a **better understanding** of their immigration options than before joining the pilot;
- Civil society organisations and government institutions can work together to design and deliver an **effective and humane alternative to detention**.

### Background

KAP's pilot was developed in collaboration with the Home Office and UNHCR, and followed the first pilot in the Community Engagement Pilot (CEP) series, [Action Access](#), delivered by Action Foundation.

According to UK government [figures](#), in the year ending June 2023, of the 20,563 individuals who left immigration detention, 75% were granted bail and therefore re-entered the community. This highlights that many people are unnecessarily enduring the distress of being detained. Furthermore, in June 2023, 569 people had been in detention for upwards of 6 months, with 27% of them detained for a year or more.

UK domestic law currently permits indefinite detention. This pilot presents a compassionate, trauma-informed and cost-effective alternative to detention. If this were made standard practice, many more people could be helped to resolve their immigration cases whilst living in the community, with detention being two-thirds more expensive.

## **Pilot Recruitment**

The Home Office specified several eligibility criteria for participants, one of which required them to have a stable home address, but they were all liable for detention. Pilot participants had to be 18-years-old or over and were recruited from across Bedford, Milton Keynes, Northampton and Luton using correspondence sent to them by the Home Office. Individuals were required to contact KAP themselves to enrol on the pilot using a dedicated telephone number, email address or webform included in the correspondence received.

## **Immigration Advice**

On joining the pilot, many participants reported that they had previously felt overwhelmed and unsure of where to turn for help. One of the key objectives of the pilot was to address this by assisting people to understand their immigration options. Participants benefited from expert immigration advice offered by qualified solicitors, spread across three meetings. This unique three-part legal model allowed participants to meet their chosen solicitor and to switch to another if they so desired following the first meeting. The second and third meetings were dedicated to understanding the specifics of their immigration situation and exploring available options. With the information provided, participants were empowered to make choices about their own futures. **In total, 65 pilot participants received legal advice, 80% of whom found that they had an option to regularise their status.**

## **Holistic casework**

Holistic casework was central to the success of the pilot. Many participants had been living in limbo, without immigration status in the UK, for 10 years or more. As a result, they presented a broad range of needs. Each participant was allocated a dedicated caseworker who played a crucial role in providing them with information about their rights and facilitating access to various services and support. For instance, some participants were unaware of their entitlement to primary healthcare and were hesitant to register with a local GP surgery. With the reassurance and guidance provided by caseworkers, these concerns were effectively addressed, enabling participants to exercise their rights and access the necessary healthcare services.

## **Evaluation Findings**

The findings captured in UNHCR's evaluation of both this pilot and the first pilot, contribute to a growing [body of evidence](#) that trauma-informed and person-centred approaches to immigration management are cost-effective, dignifying and beneficial. **This highlights that detaining people is a policy choice and not a necessity. The Detention Forum, with over 50 organisations, now calls for this model to be made standard practice across the UK.**

**There is a compassionate and practical alternative to detention.**