

The Detention Forum



A Supportive Environment (A compassionate and practical alternative to immigration detention)

Explaining our new campaign

What do we mean are we really talking about when we use the terms 'supportive environment' and 'a compassionate and practical alternative to detention'?

We're talking about how we as a society support people who find themselves:

- Unable legally to meet their basic living needs.
- Liable to have their liberty denied and to be detained indefinitely.
- Liable to be removed from the country.

They will be people who may never have had permanent right to stay in the country (such as people who have sought to stay here as refugees), or maybe thought they had the right to stay until that right was taken away from them (such as non-British nationals who serve a 12 month or longer prison sentence).

They may be people who have fallen out of the asylum system. Or they may have been refused refugee status, but they are unable to be returned to their home country and find themselves utterly destitute with no means of legally providing for their basic living needs.

They may be people who have lived in this country, ever since they were children, assuming that they would stay here for the rest of their lives, have committed a crime, which involved a prison sentence of 12 months or more, and then found themselves liable for automatic deportation to a country where they have never lived as an adult.

The critical issue here is how do we support such people?

At the moment our immigration system has a standard default setting where such people will be locked up indefinitely. Yet recent statistics show that 78% of people who are locked up in this way, will then go on to be released on bail. Why do we insist on locking so many people up indefinitely?

Pilot schemes funded by the Home Office have shown that there is a better way to support such people. The two schemes run so far have provided individuals with tailored support to such people. People have been helped them with an array of issues including as access to healthcare, as well as providing legal support. That has helped the individuals to understand the immigration process and how they can best engage with it. And evidence from similar schemes around the world confirms that this is a far more effective way of supporting people.

We would like to see this supportive approach become business as usual for our government. We would like to see each individual case managed on an individual basis, to help people see their best options for them. We want to see a supportive environment.

Such an approach is cheaper, but also more sustainable because it encourages greater involvement and understanding.

And we think that the following outcomes are possible and desirable:

- Individuals remained out of detention
- Improved health and mental health
- Better engagement with case to resolve status
- Reduced cost to the public purse for all of the above.

We know that there is a better, more humane approach to how we manage our immigration system, and we are committed as a growing network to make this change happen. We want to see a supportive environment.