

Submission to Senate Inquiry

26th April 2015

Samantha Betts (former Save The Children Child and Youth Recreation worker)
BA Community Development, B Management, GD Social Policy

NB: 'Detainees' are herein referred to as 'people'.

Physical Environment in the Camp (OPC3):

- Tents in which people are housed are inadequate;
 - temperatures of up to fifty degrees
 - unhygienic, unsealed ply-wood flooring
 - lack of privacy with a tarpaulin 'door'
 - inadequate ventilation in heat
 - inadequate protection from rain/wind
- The physical nature of the land is predominately sharp white rocks, with little area of smooth surface for children to play, or adults to sit. No grassed areas at all.
- Inadequate space for people to keep their belongings or dry their laundry; spaces of 'living quarters' are approximately 5 square meters for the average family of 4 people.
- Electrical equipment was never tested or tagged (for example fans in peoples rooms); electrical cords often ran along the ground which became concerning when large rainfall/flooding occurred. A particular concern was when the electrical cords were submerged in water with small children in proximity.
- Psychological trauma of the 'boundaries' of the camp. Temporary fencing gave the sense of 'leave anytime, you are not captive', while the punishment for stepping outside the gates amounted in being taken into Nauruan custody for 'trespassing'.

People's Health:

- The youth of the camp met with managers from DIBP, Transfield, IHMS and Save The Children in early 2014. Issues raised independently by the youth included:
 - No toilet training facilities or equipment- small children would accidentally urinate on the floor. People with inadequate footwear (broken thongs or no shoes at all) with cuts on their feet are then susceptible to disease and infection.
 - Mosquito sprays are not frequent enough to keep mosquito populations at bay.
 - Young females do not have enough engagement from medical services to assist them through their first menstruation (particularly those who are in the camp with only fathers/brothers/younger siblings).
 - Increasing presence of rats/mice lingering in the camp.
 - Security; who could the teens turn to when other males in the camp were fighting?

- Females had to ask guards (usually a male) for feminine hygiene products, and were then only given a minimal supply (1 packet of pads- not enough for a woman with a heavy flow).
- Sexual health and contraception items were very generic and had to be gained by people at the front guard station.
- Appointments at IHMS were provided on 'emergency only' type basis, with not enough mental health service providers/workers to accommodate the widespread need for mental health appointments.
- No provision of sunscreen, hats or sun protection- in 50 degree heat with full exposed sun this was highly concerning.
- Children did not have regular access to dentists; children often had to have teeth removed due to rotting.
- In mid 2014 Impetigo (school sores) was contracted by a majority of the children (aged 5-13 roughly). IHMS did their best to contain it and treat the children's wounds, and change linen. Due to short staffing though health promotion did not continue after the outbreak, and Save staff were advised not to call it an 'outbreak' in case the media got wind of the story.

Allegations of Abuse:

- Frequent staff reports of sexual, physical and emotional abuse put forward for DIBP and Wilson's knowledge. It became known as 'paperwork' from departments and was relatively a day to day occurrence with little investigation or consequences.
- DIBP were most certainly aware of physical and sexual abuse experienced by children (perpetrated by other people in the camp, their own parents or by guards/staff). Weekly reports and triaging of children's welfare were discussed between all necessary staff and sent in a report to DIBP.
- The emotional welfare of children (and their parents) was largely overlooked as 'security' took precedence;
 - Guard's boots would often wake and scare small children- when staff asked if guards could step more quietly for the children's sake it was seen as a ridiculous request.
 - Children who regressed so much as to sleep walk were often abruptly woken up and commended back to their 'home' tent.

Professional/Ethic Dilemmas:

- Not enough available interpreters or translators available to engage with people, particularly to parents about their children's needs.
- Wilson's security welfare team would ask us to 'keep eyes' on particular children they were monitoring, yet refused to give us the most basic information to know what we were 'looking out' for.

- Lack of information for staff to be aware of changing rules and expectations from Wilson's security and DIBP; particularly in relation to incident reports, protest procedures and intelligence/information sharing.
- People (usually women of the 'household') would be required to wait in line for up to three hours in the heat, without water, for their weekly shopping. Children were often pulled out of school to assist parents to wait in the line and do the shopping.
- Quite a few times (around 5 separate occasions), children as young as 5 fainted while in the OPC3 tent school, due to the heat exceeding 50 degrees. The pedestal fans were simply not enough to fully ventilate or cool the large enclosed space.
- Secretive nature of the camp, and authorities not allowing humanitarian organisations such as Amnesty, Red Cross on the UN on site.
- The lack of access to legal representation and advise for people's processing/visa claims. More specifically, the lack of opportunity for people to research and find a lawyer to represent them from within the camp, and the lack of opportunity for lawyers to provide pro-bono or paid representation due to visa limitations and contact restrictions. DIBP providing one lawyer (who DIBP appointed) to represent all asylum seekers on Nauru was unethical and a terrifying legal precedence.
- In 2014 an unexploded WW2 ordnance was found under the school tent at OPC3. We were immediately concerned. The secondary trauma of a child that has fled warfare, onto to find what they were calling a "bomb" was detrimental. It seemed so contradictory to reassure a child they are safe from the impacts of war when there's unexploded ordnance under their makeshift school classroom. The second area of concern was the fact that even though it was old and rusty, there is essentially no guarantee that it would not fire. With all of the construction work occurring on the site, the risk of machinery finding another ordnance and hitting it was enough for us to be wary for the people in the camp. We were informed a 'visual sweep' by local Transfield workers had been undertaken and there didn't appear to be any more. When we asked if a proper area check, being a non-visual sub-surface sweep had been done over the entire camp, we were told it had not been. We wanted to ensure that we could reassure the kids were safe, and also come up with a good reason of why it was there. It became clear that the remainder of the camp had not been assessed for this prior to construction works commencing to build the camp, and the 'visual sweep' was not enough to reassure a few of us workers that this was taken seriously. We knew that if this had occurred at an Australian school- the school would have been indefinitely closed with the fullest safety checks conducted. We composed a letter to the CEO of Save requesting for him to use this as an advocacy opportunity to get the kids out of the camp- it was clearly not safe, particularly when more and more rusted shrapnel kept being found by children over the following weeks.

Statement:

It is both my professional and personal opinion that all children (including unaccompanied minors) be immediately released from mandatory, indefinite detention, and immediately placed in Australian communities with their families for processing.

It is our moral obligation to these people to minimise the suffering they have already endured as the product of our immigration policy.

These children in particular, will need additional support and counselling into and throughout their adult lives to recover from the direct and indirect trauma we have inflicted on them. This trauma has adversely affected their psycho-social, physical, cognitive and emotional development; we, as a nation, are responsible for this happening to over 250 children who have lived, or continue to live in Nauru.

We now have the opportunity to change their lives for the better, and we can only ask for their forgiveness of the crimes we've committed against them in years to come.