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BY: MIG

To The Committee on Migration.

From the time that Baxter Det Centre S. A. opened I visited regularly until its closure. I knew many asylum seekers over that period of time and some I am still in contact with.

Over the years I was always shocked by the lack of dignity given to the 'detainees' with regard to their personal freedom, lack of opportunity to live anything like a 'normal' life. A normal life includes choices of when to eat, go to bed, to have personal space which would not be invaded. I saw that these people were not given adequate times to see any health professionals or to be counselled to help them withstand the situation they were in.

They did not have personal supporters who could advise about their legal rights. It seemed only when their plight was known that others from the community were able to help to some degree but I realize now how many who were in detention did not get even voluntary help.

I always felt that the 'guards' were there as a sort of humiliating presence. The asylum seekers were often misled and rarely given factual information about their rights.

It took too long for the children to be allowed to go to school or kindergarten and many years before some of the teenagers were allowed to study.

It was obvious that lack of hope due to such lengthy processing contributed to most people becoming depressed and suicidal. The facility which was opened at Glenside hospital was a major contributor to keeping our friends alive and was a model of psychiatric treatment.

I was personally involved with the care of three children – under the age of five- whose Mother had stopped speaking and eating adequately for many months before she had proper medical attention. The family as a whole were dysfunctional which was not the fault of this system but not getting help to them sooner was a basic need which was not met. The children came to live with me and constantly displayed signs of trauma. They were violent and were certainly not able to cope with daily living skills in a 'normal' home nor were they able to function in the community with other children.

Now I am still in contact with many people who have at last been granted permanent visas. I do not believe the process needed to take so long. Had many lawyers and migration agents not worked pro bono it may well have taken longer or not happened at all.

The horror for those who were deported has been a shame for us as a supposedly humane society as we know about some being killed soon after arrival or living in fear of death. Some are not able to live in their own countries and have fled again in order to find a place of safety.

The term illegal immigrant and queue jumper was propaganda used by the government to instill fear of outsiders into the average Australian community.

New Australians now living in the community are still suffering from the long term detention. Everyone I know suffers from depression and poor sleep patterns. Many suffer post traumatic stress disorder, nightmares and an inability to cope with everyday life. Children who developed stuttering in detention are still unable to speak easily and have high levels of anxiety.

Many of the adults who were productive in their own countries and had good work ethics are finding it difficult to work due to lack of concentration and anxiety.

A close friend who was raped in detention is not able to manage without support on some days in order to function well and complete even the basic activities of life.

Yours – Marilyn Penneck.