

Bridge for Asylum Seekers Foundation

Uniting Care NSW ACT

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Submission No. 5

Date Received

BY: MIB

Thank you for giving me the opportunity of commenting to the Inquiry into Immigration Detention in Australia

INQUIRY INTO IMMIGRATION DETENTION IN AUSTRALIA

Terms of reference

1. Immigration Residential Housing

As a frequent visitor to Villawood Immigration Detention Centre I have visited all areas of detention but for the purposes of the inquiry will focus on my experiences in regard to Residential Housing (IRH) area of Villawood.

As the housing for detainees is of a superior type it is not surprising that detainees I visit do not complain about the accommodation.

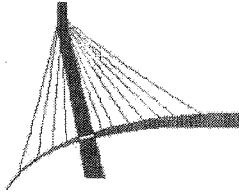
They do, however, have problems with the lack of activities available:

- a) limited use of the internet and computers;
- b) limited opportunity for shopping – problems with access to Halal meat for Muslims; Woolworths is the only supermarket to which vouchers for food, including fruit and vegetables are provided. Shopping excursions are undertaken on Sunday afternoon when Woolworths has run out of fresh fruit and vegetables (there is a fruit market nearby);
- c) no opportunity no opportunity to participate in a gym or any type of sport as they were able to do in Stages 2 and 3.
- d) no library facilities

There are also problems with excursions and shopping trips from the IRH

- a) Detainees must be escorted by two designated persons and a schedule provided of every movement about two weeks in advance of an excursion
- b) Sometimes the approval is not granted until the evening before the excursion is to take place. This makes life extremely difficult for who the designated persons, volunteers who time to plan their times and are not sure until the night before if the excursion is take place.
- c) It is also inconvenient – and expensive for Immigrations - for two guards to be required for each detainee on shopping trips

It should also be noted that the Villawood IRH is more than half empty at any time of the week because the conditions for moving detainees from Stages 2 and 3 are so strict. At any time during the day there are from 2 to 4 members of staff on duty supervising, at present, there are only about 12 detainees in the houses. There are 8 houses in all with 3 bedrooms each which I believe could house at least 24 people.



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2. Community Detention - a cheaper alternative than keeping people in VIDC or any locked facility.

I have had the opportunity of assisting a number of former Villawood detainees including those living in community detention.

In one case, the detainee was moved to rented accommodation from an unsatisfactory boarding situation which was organised by the Red Cross. Funds were not available for the sub-standard bed sitter which was all he could afford to rent, and he has required assistance from community groups and BASF because the Red Cross allowance has been insufficient for his other needs including telephone, transport and food. I was able to provide a bed, some furniture, a TV and household goods

In addition, he still has the same difficulties in relation to lack of funds as other detainees on the Community Detention Pilot scheme including access to public transport to visit friends, and access to gyms, swimming pools and other sporting facilities or English courses.

My suggestions to assist detainees in community detention to live a fuller life are as follows:

- They should be provided with weekly bus/train tickets to ensure that they are able to attend medical appointments, and visit their friends
- They should be given access to OCL or other English classes.
- They should be given an allowance to join a gym or swimming pool in their local areas.
- Even if the s417/48B application is still being assessed, DIAC could start the process of obtaining health and character checks so that they do not have to wait an inordinate time for residential status.
- Without work rights many lose their self esteem and suffer depression from the lack of anything to do to fill their spare time.

Needless to say, all of these suggestions will require additional funding being given to the Red Cross, which is doing its utmost to provide assistance with a very small staff and what are obviously inadequate funds. On the other hand, it would still appear to be a much smaller amount than per detainee than is required at Villawood Immigration Detention Centre.

Virginia Walker
Honorary Chairperson
BRIDGE FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS FOUNDATION