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Submission to the  
Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission  
National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention  
by the KIDS (Kids in Detention Story) Working Group

## APPENDIX FURTHER INTERVIEW MATERIAL

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We have included below material collected through three interviews which were conducted for the purposes of this submission, which were, because of time constraints, unable to be included in the body of the submission. We conducted many interviews for the purposes of the submission and most have informed the body of the submission. We did not want constraints of time to mean that the stories told to us in the interviews below would not be told in the submission.

### INTERVIEW ONE

#### RECORD OF INTERVIEW WITH FORMER DETAINEES AT WOOMERA DETENTION CENTRE

RS & AB were detained in Woomera for nearly a year. RS is a single parent and AB is the child of RS. RS has another child whose whereabouts are not known. RS and AB are keen for their story and experiences in detention to be told.

Please note: RS and AB request that this story be used for the purpose of the HREOC submission only. If this story is to be used for another purpose, their permission should be requested.

RS: We arrived in Australia and were soon taken by Customs authorities and the Immigration Department. All our belongings were taken away by Customs (including some of the little money we had). The Immigration people gave placed tags (with numbers) in our wrists. Badges with our names and photos were placed around our necks (like prisoners.....th at is how we felt). We were not asked any questions except what belongings we had. No questions about our status or why we came to Australia

They [authorities] took us to Woomera Detention Centre. We were placed in tents with mattresses on the floor. It was summer in Australia and the weather was extremely hot in Woomera. We stayed in Woomera for five months. After the riots we were able to lodge our asylum claims. We had no representation nor before the riots.

Question: What were the conditions like for children?

RS:.....As a parent you feel hopeless and helpless. We fled persecution in our home country and we feel persecuted in Australia because of who we are, "Refugees". Conditions inside the detention were very bad.....

My child and myself were placed in tents when we arrived. We slept on mattresses on the floor. Children slept on the floor in mattresses. We shared the tent with other families. It was overcrowded; families were cramped together in tents. At one stage about six families with children were placed in the one tent. Children had no place to play inside the tents. There was a small space that separated mattresses. We did not have enough space to put our mats to pray.

About a month later we were moved to Caravans. The caravans were subdivided into rooms by cardboards. There was no privacy. You could hear everything through the cardboard.

Bathrooms and toilets were outside about 200 meters away from the caravans. The weather at night would change to bitter cold. Children would refuse to go to the toilet at night. Some of them will wet their beds instead. The guards would come in the morning and abuse the children for wetting the beds. It was difficult for children to wake up and walk 200 meters to go to the toilet at night. Most people will catch a cold specially children.

Food was very poor. We had three meals per day, breakfast, lunch and dinner. The meals were horrible. Breakfast was cereal and small glass of milk. Only small babies were allowed extra milk (2 cups per day). Lunch consisted of rice, lentils and a block of meat. The meat was too hard to eat. We did not know if it was hallal meat (meat slaughtered in an Islamic way). The authorities in the detention had little knowledge about our cultural / religious. Once a week we had fish and chips or hamburger and chips. Most children would stay hungry between meals. My child did not like the food at all

and if we chose to have one item we were refused. The canteen people would say “you either take it all or not at all”. If you missed a meal, you will have to wait till the next one. My child got sick a few times and he could not eat during meal hours. I was not allowed to take food outside the canteen. The guards would constantly search our rooms.

Pregnant women were allowed extra vegetables like tomatoes and cucumber, but they had to bring in medical certificate from the doctor who visited us once a month.

“In a country like Australia I find it hard to understand that food would be scarce”. As a parent you feel so powerless. You feel powerless because you can not provide enough food for your child

I got a job in the detention and I was given points (instead of money). I traded my points to buy extra food for my child. I did not have a choice on what food I bought for my child. For example I would order chips and would get chocolate instead. My child would be so disappointed and in tears. Can you imagine it? You could not even choose what food your child eats when you have paid for it. If we ask the guards would tell us that was what we ordered.

The weather was very hot, so children could not play outside until late afternoon. There were no activities for the children. After some months in the detention children were allowed to go to school for two hours per day. Teachers were adult detainees. There were no other activities for the children afterwards. Some of the older children played soccer with the adults. When children were outside, the guards constantly watched them. Children were particularly afraid of the guards.

The weather changed dramatically at night. It gets very cold in the desert. Most children did not have enough clothing. A lot of them [children] walked without shoes for months. It was hard to go outside at night because of the weather.

Water taps were placed next to the toilets. There was one tap per 100 people. We did not have cold water. Taps were placed under the sun. We always drank warm water during the day.

My child got sick a number of times. I took my child to the clinic. The nurse told us “drink six glasses of water and you will get better”. The next day my child got worse and was given two Panadol. At night the guards would wake us up three times for head counts. We were not allowed to close our caravans. Guards stormed into the tents with their torches and counted detainees at 7pm, 12am and 4am. The guards put the torches right on our face. Children were very traumatised. Most children were unable to sleep again and would be too tired during the day.

Some would start crying; some would find it hard to sleep again. This was particularly traumatising for children.

Question: What are the things that you remember most about children in detention?

RS “I remember this young girl about 13 or 14 years old, I do not know she could have been 15. The girl has been sitting in her bed inside the caravan for two days. Her parents were traumatised and did not seem to care. I went to see her with my neighbour. We wanted to help her. When we lifted her from bed, she was soaked in blood. Apparently she had her period while she was asleep. She was ashamed to leave the caravan because one of the guards has seen the blood and told her she was very filthy and unclean. She did not have pads. We went to the clinic and got her pads. Two days she came back to me and told me she had finished her pads and wanted some more. We both went to the clinic and she was refused. We were told “you get one box 10 pads and that should last you for a month”. I was horrified.

Pads were not distributed with other toiletries. We had to ask for them at the clinic and it was 10 pads per month.

Every day the guards searched our rooms. Once a week we had toiletries handed. By the end of the week the guards would take the leftovers and redistribute them to us again.

The riots in Woomera. It was very disturbing for my child. People going on hunger strike their bodies looking like skeletons and the guards made fun of them.

Waking up in the middle of the night three times at 7pm, 12am and 4am for head counting. The guards barged in the rooms with torches directed at our faces. Most children did not sleep after 12am. Some of them would continue crying till the morning.

RS decided she did not want to talk anymore and we stopped the interview. She finally said

“ I have been persecuted in my country because my partner opposes the regime, I’m persecuted in Australia for being a refugee. Will I ever see justice for myself and my children?”

## INTERVIEW WITH AB

The parent spoke in the presence of AB. AB wanted to add a couple of things only.

AB: I was at an age I could neither be an adult or a child. I would not play with the younger ones because I'm too tall and the older ones treated me like a kid. I did not like the food. I lost so much weight. When I got sick I was given Panadol. At night I was woken three times for headaches by the guards. That was very frightening. I was always scared. I could not sleep again.

I like school, but we were only allowed 2 hours each day (Monday to Friday) and we had no books to read. No activities to play. I always saw people getting angry and aggressive. I feared some of the guards. They would say nasty things to us. Like "You go back to your country. No one in Australia like you" Sometimes they would bring in newspaper clippings and I would give it to my parent to read. It was always bad stuff.

I'm outside detention now, which is lucky but I do not know where my other parent and siblings are. I like to look for them one day. I hope the Australian government would allow me to do that. I sometimes blame my parent for no reason when I get angry. I get angry a lot. Because I do not know what my future is. I like to think otherwise, but with Temporary Protection Visa I have no future.

I like to say this finally "Please treat us like decent human beings otherwise we will break and.....I like to think of my future in a positive way but it is too hard at the moment. Too many things to think about....Thank you.

I like to fly kites because kites go everywhere and can see everything. I like to think I'm a kite.

## INTERVIEW TWO

### INTERVIEW WITH DETAINEE RELEASED FROM MARIBYRNONG DETENTION CENTRE

#### ANTICIPATION

M described an atmosphere within detention centres gripped by uncertainty and the continuous, daily anticipation that 'Maybe today I'll be forced to leave'. The frustration was so great that before retiring at night, detainees would call out to each other, 'Maybe tomorrow I won't see you!'. M talked about the psychological effect this has on people who have come from a place of suffering and who have built up their hopes that upon their arrival in Australia they will no longer need to fear the government and police. He likens the effect to 'eating our lives away.'

#### DOWNWARDS SPIRAL

When asked specifically about the children M had shared the detention experience with, he described an initial period of excitement - the centre isn't like real life, it feels almost like a game. But then as time passes the children gradually change. Children who may have been 'brilliant' and polite slowly become deeply anti-social and, in some cases, aggressive. In the first case, M spoke about children of 8 or 9 years sitting in their family's darkened room all day long - blinds closed, alone - refusing even their parents' company. In the second case, M told us about how, with some children, they would 'say hello and say their name' but the children would become angry and run over to start hitting the other detainees.

#### CONFUSION

We were told that the children's anguish took place in a vacuum of understanding - they cannot understand what is going on, they cannot logically think about, they cannot blame anyone. We heard of parents being asked by their children, 'Why are we here? Is God punishing us for being refugees? Is God punishing us for coming to Australia?' We also heard of instances in which the parents themselves would become so angry with their powerlessness that their own children, unable to place their parents' frustration, became afraid of them. M spoke of some children who wouldn't even speak to their parents, claiming 'they're not the same'. Later in the interview, M suggested that the children he came across could probably have coped with an initial period of detention lasting no more than one or two months whilst identity checks were carried out - but that children then ought to be released into the community while their families' claims were processed.

In contrast to this - M knew children who were born in Maribyrnong and were still there to celebrate their second birthdays.

Comparing his own experience to that of the children he knew, M noted that the children changed themselves irrevocably in response to the abnormality of their childhood. He spoke of children with no capacity to answer the underlying question, 'Why is this happening to me?' Unlike the adults, who could place the detention experience in the context of the suffering that forced them to leave their homeland in the first place, children had no intellectual tools to cope with the nightmares, trauma and depression they experienced. With no idea of how to get out of such patterns the children usually became very angry and intensely anti-social. He spoke in particular of one nine year old girl who started getting extremely angry every time she saw other people, or even her own parents, entrenched in her mindset of hatred and captive to the notion that everyone was trying to harm her.

#### CAN I STUDY?

One young man captured the heart of M with his own unique response to detention. A boy at the age of 12 who gently absorbed the company of those around him and the experiences that had led them to Australia - comparing those people with himself. His conclusions? 'I've had no education. I come from a low background, an uneducated background.' Out of this came a desire to study and improve himself - or in M's words 'He wanted to be a man'. And so he embarked upon a campaign requesting either external schooling or even just materials to study independently inside the detention centre. After his many requests to the Department and anyone else he thought could help him failed, this young man who had been possessed of such determination finally cracked:

**"For one week he was on a hunger strike,he wanted to go to school ... we were inside the classroom, and the courtyard there ... he teared his shirt open and he was lying on the courtyard all the day, crying. And the mother was watching that from inside the classroom,and she was crying. And we were inside the classroom,trying to comfort her, and she was crying. Because,she couldn't help her son. And at the very same time,she couldn't go and tell her son,'look you are not allowed to study, understand that',or 'don't worry about studying'. But she was nowhere,and the son...he was only twelve years of age ... he doesn't want to go to a night-club,he only wants to go and study - but he was not allowed."**

These incidences affect everyone inside the centre - particularly the other children whose social world has shrunk to the 70 to 100 fellow detainees with whom they interact, and more importantly, from whom they learn about life skills during their formative childhood years.

#### NEW FRIENDS

It emerges that inside the Maribyrnong centre, a strange community of both asylum seekers and people who have resided within Australia but are now awaiting criminal deportation exists as one. Although sleeping areas are divided - females, males and families - the remainder of the centre, such as dining and immigration areas, are common spaces. Children roam freely through these areas, meeting and interacting with a range of people their parents would prefer their children not to have met. In particular, M described the powerlessness on behalf of parents to prevent their children 'learning things' from some people awaiting criminal deportation. M talked about how these people were much more assured and confident than the refugees, they had contacts outside the centres and they had a much greater understanding of Australian systems. He said that they were 'very good at using the kids' to defeat the close supervision of their own movements. 'You do this! You do that!' The children learned things they shouldn't have and their parents had no control over the process. In such a totally closed environment, parents cannot restrict their children to a single bedroom - hence the exposure to smoking, drugs and so on.

#### THE STAFF

In respect of interactions between staff and the detainees, M described a lack of understanding but not necessarily malice. While a person is inside a detention centre, the sole avenue of help comes through the Department. A Department 'trying to understand what's going on' but unable to move beyond the conception that 'You have to stay inside while we process you - so don't worry about it.' M talked about 90% of the guards being 'wonderful, nice people' - leaving the remainder as people who 'shouldn't be there at all'. He also told us that the 'good people' do not try to stop the 'bad people' because of the way the system operates. The result? 'It's like a small drop of poison in a whole cup of milk.'

#### SEARCHED

Some of the young children with M in Maribyrnong were fortunate enough to be released from the centre each day to travel to a local primary school. These children, aged around 7-9 years, were subjected to

a thorough security check each afternoon upon their return from what had been a normal school day. The contents of their pockets were scrutinised, each page of their school books checked individually - 'everything' was checked. Such treatment instilled in the children a sense of guilt not grounded in reality. The fear that 'maybe they'll find something on me today?' battled daily with another part of their psyche - the logical brain that knew they had done nothing wrong. In his own experience M described to us the irrational fear that grips his chest even now when a cash register attendant inspects his bags at a supermarket - 'maybe something fell from the shelf and is in my bag!'. In M's opinion, treating the children with constant guilt and scrutiny amounts to 'planting the fear in their mind' - something that will likely stay with them long after they leave detention.

#### ASSISTANCE

In the context of such deep-seated problems as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, nightmares ... detainees are in dire need of assistance. Unfortunately, outside medical help is unavailable and that which is available internally consists of band-aid measures such as proffering a panadol to a child complaining of nightmares or intense back and shoulder pain (widely associated with depression and other mental illness). The medical treatment available is very general and cannot help the problems that detainees are actually experiencing. M talked about the need for a different sort of treatment. However, even those detainees who may have suffered horrendously either at home or during their journey are subjected to the restrictions on contacting the 'Foundation for Trauma'. Requests for psychological assistance must be approved by the Department - and is oft-denied, preserved for very rare instances. We were told that even in cases where detainees have requested assistance that they will personally pay for, permission has been refused, suggesting that the rationale for refusal extends more deeply than economics. M described detention as a 'very closed situation' permitting no free or independent assessment.

#### FESTIVITY?

With independent observers or carers blocked at every turn, the only outsiders who have actually witnessed the inside of detention centres have been officially invited and accompanied during their visit. M talked about the way everyone inside would realise an official visit was imminent due to the sudden and inexplicable appearance of BBQs and pizza, with chocolates and balloons for the children. However, we also heard that when detainees attempted to speak to visitors directly 'they tried to escape.' Visits are kept strictly clinical - observation rather than interaction - and in circumstances that M feels distort the reality of how detainees are treated on a daily basis.

### INTERVIEW THREE

RECORD OF INTERVIEW WITH FP, A REGULAR VISITOR TO THE MARIBYRNONG DETENTION CENTRE (CONDUCTED 15 MARCH 2002).

FP is a grandmother in her late 60s who has been visiting families at Maribyrnong Detention Centre since mid-2001. Her motivation was to help people who were, in her opinion, unfairly treated. She has particular concern for the children who suffer in a situation they can not understand and that is not of their making. She can particularly relate to this as she had been separated from her parents as a child and suffered under persecuting from the Nazis.

*"When I visited Maribyrnong Detention Centre for the first time, I thought I was taking gifts to the children. I was taken aback by meeting the guards, I was going into a prison. I was in turmoil, I had to give my name and address, wear a bracelet, wait at a door - click - to let you through into a little room - click again - guards watching all the time. There were metal detectors, we were waiting, I was sweating, it brought back memories of my childhood. Another click and we walked into the visitor's room. They looked through the stuff we brought. We saw the family come from behind another door, a guard was with them. It was all very traumatic for me".*

**Note:** FP was a 'Hidden Child' during World War 2 to survive persecution by the Nazis.

FP talked about how unexpected the situation was, how it affected her emotionally, how the joy of meeting a family and, particularly, the children to give them presents was taken away. "You got too many things" the guard complained. FP had brought games, puzzles, all 'little pieces', to amuse the children - the presents were not given to the children until after the visitors left. "The children looked

at me like a stranger. They were lying on the carpet. Who do they think I am? They were all over D." (D. is a regular visitor to the Centre and had introduced FP to the family).

FP explained that she was very stressed, in 'quite a state', after the visit and had to talk to a counsellor. On subsequent visits she brought her sister along (who was similarly affected by her own first visit). Most of this account was given to the interviewers in a shaking voice with tears brimming in FP's eyes.

**"It's OK now, we don't cry in front of the children, it is necessary that we show that we care. We bring the children what they want." They also bring clothes for the mother.**

FP visited one family, a woman with three children. The woman, we were told, was alone and isolated because there was only one other person in the Centre she could communicate with in her particular Afghani language and that person was to be released soon. The children spoke English to the visitors, a 4 1/2 year old girl, a three year old boy and a seven months old baby. The baby was born while the mother was in detention. The baby's father had been taken by the Taliban and it is not known if he is still alive.

FP also visits a 25 year- old man who is befriending the family.

FP explained that the attitude of guards is difficult to understand - they can be nice and then, again, be unreasonable. Some of the children labelled one guard as 'Mr No' and another as 'Mrs Tomorrow'. The latter was a counsellor and was described by FP as being nice and trying to do her best but having little power and being ineffectual. FP gave examples: "The little boy was wearing little pink thongs, too small and too worn down. We wanted to buy him a pair of shoes. 'Mrs Tomorrow' said there was no need, they had money to do that. A month later nothing had happened. We measured his feet and brought a pair at the next visit. We begged the guard to let us try on the shoes to see if they fitted, so we could exchange if necessary. They did relent that time."

Another time FP wanted to take the children to the park to have a picnic, considering the absence of any garden or nice outdoor area in the centre that is surrounded by a high razor-wire fence. 'Mrs Tomorrow' thought that this was a good idea and that she would put in a request to the head office. Nothing happened, FP rang the manager, who after a number of calls said "nothing to do with us, it's the Department of Immigration.... that deals with this". This was before Christmas, the children have yet to see a park and it is nearly Easter.

Schooling was another case in point. The oldest child, a very bright girl, should be starting school, the boy should go to kinder. Again, inquiries did not lead to anything, the school year had started but no education for these children in detention. FP related how older children had told them how much they hated to arrive at school in a van under escort.

There are no other children at the Centre now for the children to play with, only adults. "She is such a sad little girl!" said FP about the 4 1/2 year old girl. The little boy adores the young Afghani man who befriends the family, "his little face lights up when he is around, but he will be gone soon and what will happen then? The mother's second application for asylum has been rejected, who will help her when he is gone? No wonder the mother is depressed. Adults speak in front of the children and they pick up the mood."

FP recounted a conversation with the father of another family who thanked her for bringing gifts, but said that the children were hungry. She was shaken by this. The man said it was not that there was no food, but that the children would not eat strange fare. FP thought that people running these centres should learn about cultural habits. What the children wanted was fruit and unflavoured yoghurt. They like bread with yoghurt for breakfast. "We were told that we could only bring two pieces of fruit per person. So, we counted this family and that family and ended up with a few kilograms of this and that. The guard greeted us with "far too much fruit, it'll just go rotten in their rooms" - we had misunderstood, it was 5-6 pieces per family... Anyway we brought a kg of yoghurt each time".

Question: What affects you most about the children in the Centre?

**"For me the worst is that the children see that their parents have no power, that they cannot give their children what they ask for. Just like it was for my parents."**

Question: Who makes the rules?

**"Rules change all the time, it's difficult to know what's not allowed. I sometimes think they just want to show you who's the boss". FP finds it particularly hard that visitors are never told when**

their families are leaving, suddenly they are gone without forwarding address. Detainees can have visitors every day unless there is a demonstration. Visitors have to say whom they want to visit, they usually get permission as long as it's not too many people at one time.

An example of fickle rules: 'The birthday Cake':

"We were told it was a child's birthday, so we said we will bring a cake. We bought a nice cake, not too creamy, nicely decorated with 'Happy birthday' written on it. We were very happy as we arrived with it in a little box, only to be told 'it's not allowed'. 'Why', we asked? 'You can cut it yourself, we have not hidden anything in it'. The guard walked out and came back and said that it was not the child's birthday anyway, he had checked the file. Well maybe it was a names-day or another special day or something, anyway what does it matter. No, we could not give it to the child!"

"Most of the time the children just sit there, they look so sad. Only time we had fun with them was when we could bring some balloons, they laughed and ran around to catch them. But when it was all over, their faces closed again, they looked sad".

Question: What changes in the system are needed to address powerlessness?

"Should be a centre, not a prison. Life should be different, they should not feel the way they do.... I am a total stranger, I come in and talk and laugh, how do they know they can trust me? I do not ask any questions. If you have been through lots of hiding, you learn not to tell the truth. How do children know whom to trust? How do they know who we are?"

I remember my own feelings when my mother was totally powerless. It upsets me that I feel powerless now, and it upsets me that this is in Australia and the guards are not Nazis, they are Aussies, I live in this country. The guards to me represent the system."

Question: What are you getting out of it? (We got a passionate, emotional answer):

"I am standing up and doing something.

During the Nazi period, people did nothing. I cannot do this. I want to be counted.

I am right and they are wrong."

The final word goes to the young man soon to be released, when FP asked him how he would feel once he was out of the Centre, he said: "I won't be looking at the sky when I get out. That's all I have been doing for two years. I will look at places and people..."

## INTERVIEW FOUR

INTERVIEW WITH REGULAR VISITOR TO MARIBYONG DETENTION CENTRE.

K spent 8 years teaching English to detainees in the Maribyrong Detention Centre. During this time she was unable to speak publicly about the events she witnessed for fear of being barred from visiting the centre. It is only now that she has stopped visiting the centre that she is able to tell of the inhumane conditions in which the adults and children in detention lived.

The frustration and distress K feels is obvious when discussing the plight of refugees in immigration detention. Over the eight years she spent teaching at the Centre she was allowed to do less and less for the detainees, particularly once Australian Correctional Management (ACM) took over. The impotence she felt at having her ability to help the detainees increasingly restricted eventually became too much for her, and was a contributing factor in her decision to cease working there.

K felt it necessary to first describe the conditions and the atmosphere in the detention centre so as to give us some context before talking about the children's experiences. She expressed her disgust at the glossy brochure produced by ACM outlining the facilities and entertainment available to detainees. She spoke with bitter amusement of its reference to excursions to the movies – in her experience, only one detainee had ever gone to the movies and this was not arranged by ACM – they'd escaped the Centre for a few hours and taken themselves. She also told of its boasting of a herb garden which, in reality, consisted of a few measly bushes attended to by one of the detainees. She said that many of the detainees felt they would be better off in prison. There they would have their own room, the possibility of earning money and most importantly, a date on which they could look forward to leaving. The detainees have no such luxuries.

The Maribynong Detention Centre is small enough that its perimeter can be walked in five minutes, yet it houses 90 to 100 people. Four people sleep to one room; often the occupants are of different nationalities. Four rooms in the Centre are designated for families. If there are more than four families in the centre at one time, however, then the mother and children of two different families must share, while the fathers are placed in a separate area. K emphasized how stressful this is for the mothers, trying to look after distressed and bored children with so little privacy and without the support of their husbands. Child-rearing in the centre is not an enviable occupation. The detainees are not allowed to cook for themselves. Although the cooks try to cater for different nationalities, often people are unable to eat the food provided.

K explained how she watched the new arrivals to Maribynong almost invariably follow the same path through shock and distress to depression and despair. Initially, they are brought into the detention center in a van much like a paddy wagon. The first thing they see is the intimidating sight of two high cyclone fences topped with rolls of razor wire; if they arrive at night the whole centre is flooded with light, inspiring comparisons with a concentration camp. After being driven through two gates to reach the inside of the centre, the impression most have is that they have arrived in prison. Not surprisingly, they arrive in a state of deep shock.

This period of shock usually lasts for up to 3 weeks, during which time they are often too afraid to talk to the other detainees. Along with the obvious communication problems associated with being surrounded by many different nationalities, they also remain suspicious of those from the same country, as they have often escaped from situations of persecution and fear. Once they begin to ask questions they would discover that many other detainees had been in the center for years, some even 3 or 4 years. While initially they are confident that their own situation will guarantee them the refuge they seek, they slowly begin to realize that their case is no worse than anyone else's – they are all as desperate as each other. It is at this point, K explained, that nearly everyone, regardless of profession or education, sinks into a deep depression. K recalls sadly that there are few exceptions to this trend. Their attendance at English classes becomes erratic as they lose their hope and motivation. They seem preoccupied and broken. Many told her they had the details of their stories, or what they told their lawyer, constantly running through their head.

K said that although some of the ACM officers treated the detainees with respect, many acted aggressively towards them, and were constantly on the defensive. The fact that they were working 12 hour shifts did not help their temperament. Often the nurse had to reject genuinely sick people because they were understaffed. The detainees came to refer to the Doctor as 'Dr Panadol' and the Nurse as 'Mrs Sorry'. Symptoms of depression were generally treated with sleeping pills. As their dependency on such pills began to affect their normal sleeping patterns, detainees would often take to sleeping during the day and staying up at night playing card games. While this meant that they avoided being hassled by the guards, K explained that nighttime was also somehow more bearable for them – the reality of their situation was not so keenly felt at night as during the day when they were more acutely aware of the world that existed beyond the centre's fences.

She questioned the effect that watching their parents sink into depression would have on a child. Pointing out that their inability to verbalise their feelings and emotions would only compound the situation. K explained that children up to the critical age of 3 were particularly vulnerable in detention. They could pick up on body language and absorb the atmosphere and yet were unable to verbalise their feelings. She saw the psychological effects manifest themselves. One girl held a constant manic grin on her face, others had bitten nails or stayed in their rooms all day. She explained that outings only made it worse as they had a taste of what was outside detention only to have it taken away.

K told of one event where a mother, who had been refused a visa application, burnt all her bedding where her daughter stood outside the room. K talked of the constant possibility of suicides. Even though parents try to supervise their children they can not prevent them from seeing all that goes on in such a confined space. The children witness their parents depressed, angry and upset, they also watch as the officers order their parents around.

K tells of an incident where a deeply religious Moslem woman was eventually forced to send her son to a Catholic school. After initially preventing him from going with the other children from detention he became so distressed that she had to let him go. K explained that this was taking away her ability of mother and expressed that 'no-one should be put under that kind of pressure'. She watched this particular woman become more and more distant as a result.