

# **The Detention Inquiry**

## **How to get your voice heard**

**Guide for groups**  
**28 July 2014**

**The Detention Forum**



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Follow us on Twitter **@DetentionForum** and keep updated.  
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## INTRODUCTION

### 1. About the Detention Forum

The Detention Forum is a network of about 30 groups who have come together to question and challenge the UK's use of immigration detention. We are working together to put a time limit on detention, end detention of vulnerable people and improve the judicial oversight of detention.

### 2. What is this inquiry about?

The first ever parliamentary inquiry into immigration detention was launched on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2014. It is jointly led by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees and the All Party Parliamentary Group on Migrations (for more information about APPGs, see [here](#)).

A parliamentary inquiry is where MPs (Members of Parliament, people who sit in the House of Commons) and peers (people who sit in the House of Lords) call for written evidence and convene a panel to hear further oral evidence about a particular issue, in this case immigration detention in the UK. Once the inquiry has read and heard all of the evidence, they issue a report with recommendations for the people making policy (the government and the Home Office and, indirectly, other political parties hoping to be in government). The recommendations have no legal weight – the government can ignore the recommendations, but the involvement of lots of cross-party MPs and peers makes it unlikely they could entirely ignore the conclusions of the inquiry. The report (and therefore the evidence submitted to the inquiry) could have a positive influence on the way detention is operated in the UK. The inquiry – in itself – is very very unlikely to result in the end of all detention, even if this is what most of the evidence calls for. It's an important step, however, in challenging detention in the UK and getting MPs, peers and others to take action on this issue.

The deadline for written submissions (you submit evidence about detention in writing) is 1 October 2014. The first oral evidence session took place on 17 July 2014. It is likely that there will be a couple more oral evidence sessions after 1 October 2014. It is anticipated that its final report will be published in January 2015.

### 3. Why should we be involved?

The inquiry is important for everyone who is opposed to immigration detention or is concerned about it, because:

- The inquiry panel is particularly keen to hear from individuals with experience of detention. This includes people who are currently in detention, as well as people who are now living in the community, regardless of their immigration status. These people are 'experts-by-experience', yet seldom heard directly by MPs, peers and others who make policies about detention. It is an opportunity for them to take part in a political debate about immigration detention.
- It is an opportunity to demonstrate that many people, beyond the geographical locations of the detention centres, are concerned about immigration detention.

- It is an opportunity to demonstrate that there needs to be long-term dedicated parliamentary scrutiny of detention (which currently does not exist). It's important the inquiry has concrete outcomes and we all need to do our best to make our voice heard. The inquiry's final report *might* contain recommendations for the government before the next General Election. It could be a tool to take the government and the politicians to account, so feeding into the inquiry which shapes the final report is important.

#### 4. Why is the Detention Forum producing this guide?

The Detention Forum is encouraging its members and others to make submissions and will try to engage parliamentarians and others during the inquiry. We are therefore making two guides, a guide for groups and a guide for individuals (i.e. people who are in detention or who have experience of detention).

These guides are available to everyone who needs it in the hope that more people, particularly those people with direct experience of detention, feel confident about making their voices heard. However, this does not mean that we are the experts! So please bear in mind that the information contained in these guides are only suggestions. Perhaps you have a better idea – if so, let us know.

**5. Where can I find out more about the inquiry?** - For more information about the inquiry, visit its official website at [www.detentioninquiry.com](http://www.detentioninquiry.com). You might wish to follow them on Twitter at @APPGRefugees. The hashtag for the inquiry is #detentioninquiry

**6. Need more help? Want to chat?** - If you are going to use this guide, we would like to hear from you. Drop us a line at [detentionforum@gmail.com](mailto:detentionforum@gmail.com) and let us know whether you have found it useful. If you want to have a chat about the guide, please also contact us.



Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre

## HOW TO GET INVOLVED

**1. Deadline?** The most important deadline is 1 October 2014, which is the deadline for written submissions to the inquiry panel.

### **2. If you are currently in detention or were in detention and now living in the community...**

If you are currently in detention or were in detention and now living in the community, please refer to 'The guide to individuals'. The guide will be made available in early August.

If you are in detention now;

- you can tell the inquiry about your experience of detention, and what you think should be done, by completing the form which we will produce in early August 2014. This will not be an official form but it may help to put your views across to the panel. Or you can write a submission without a form, by carefully answering the questions listed at [www.detentioninquiry.com](http://www.detentioninquiry.com). Remember the panel is likely to receive many submissions and they will not be responding to all the points raised by the submissions.
- find out if the visitor's group to your detention centre can help you with submitting written evidence.
- find out if your friends or supporters can help you with submitting written evidence.
- contact us if you can't find anyone to help you. Please email us at [detentionforum@gmail.com](mailto:detentionforum@gmail.com) with your name, detention number and mobile number and we will call you back to see if we can help. Unfortunately we cannot guarantee to help everyone.
- after you have made a submission, only if you want to and if you think it is safe to do so, you could tell your MP that you have made a submission and you want him/her to go and attend the oral hearing sessions of the inquiry. You can, of course, ask your MPs to do other things too, such as supporting a campaign.

If you were in detention in the past but are now living in the community;

- you can tell the inquiry about your experience of detention, and what you think should be done, by completing the form which we will produce in early August 2014. This will not be an official form but it may help you to put your views across to the panel. Or you can write a submission without a form, by carefully answering the questions listed at [www.detentioninquiry.com](http://www.detentioninquiry.com). Remember the panel is likely to receive many submissions and they will not be responding to all the points raised by the submissions.
- find out if there are any local groups supporting asylum seekers, refugees and migrants can help you with submitting written evidence. Show them this guide.
- if you can't find anyone to help you, please email us at [detentionforum@gmail.com](mailto:detentionforum@gmail.com) with your name and mobile number and we will email you to see if we can do. Unfortunately we cannot guarantee to help everyone.
- after you have made a submission, only if you want to and if you think it is safe to do so, you could tell your MP that you have made a submission and you want him/her to go and attend the oral hearing sessions of the inquiry. You can, of course, ask your MPs to do other things too, such as supporting a campaign.

### 3. If you are a charity, community organisation, or campaign group...

If you are a charity, community organisation, or campaign group in touch with people in detention, who were in detention and/or who support people with experience of detention, you can do the following (and more if you want);

- help individuals affected by detention to make individual submissions. You might want to use the form we will produce in early August (see above) or simply follow the questions listed on the inquiry panel website.
- if you are in touch with a group of individuals who are/were affected by detention, host 'focus group' style discussions to gather evidence in a safe environment and submit it on their behalf. Please see **4. Gathering evidence for submission – tips for groups** below for further information – however we trust you have existing knowledge and skills and you may not need our input!
- After you have made a submission, consider engaging local MPs so that they know that local communities are concerned about this issue. For more information, read the section **Amplify the impact of your submission** on page 12.

### 4. Gathering evidence for submission – tips for groups

*Warning – if your group already has lots of experience in interviewing people and collating information, there is probably no need to read this section! You probably know better than us what to do!*

If your group is gathering evidence from a group of individuals to put together a submission document, you can do this in a number of ways. Your group may have an existing protocol for doing this type of work. You might also have your own evidence and information you have collected over the years.

For those groups who are new to this type of activity, there are many ways of feeding into the inquiry. You can, for instance, interview each individual, summarise their answers and write them up into a single document as a submission. Alternatively, you could, help each individual to prepare his/her own submission. You can also get people together as a group to collate evidence and collectively agree what should go into the submission, including recommendations.

The section below deals with the last option.

### 5. What the panel wants to know

According to the Detention Inquiry website, the panel wants to know the answers to the questions below. The first set of questions are for individuals with direct experience of detention and the second set of questions are for others. However, they overlap and also your group might have a combination of people. If you are making submissions as a group, we think you will be mainly addressing the questions in the second part of the text (in italics) below. *If your group involves primarily people with direct experience of detention, you might prefer to answer the first questions only. Whatever you do, make sure you give example and evidence to illustrate your points.*

For those with direct experience of immigration detention, please include as much information as you can about:

- Your experiences of living in immigration detention, including the context and duration of your stay;
- The conditions in immigration detention, including your ability to access services such as legal advice, healthcare, pastoral support;
- Whether there were appropriate mechanisms to deal with any mental, physical or emotional issues you may have experienced prior to or during your time in detention;
- Any longer-term impacts of detention on you, your family and/or your wider community;
- Any other information about detention that you would like to share.

*For all other respondents, please address some/all of the following questions, supporting your answers with examples and evidence where possible:*

- *What are your views on the current conditions within UK immigration detention centres, including detainees' access to advice and services? Please highlight any areas where you think that improvements could be made.*
- *How far does the current detention system support the needs of vulnerable detainees, including pregnant women, detainees with a disability and young adults?*
- *What are the impacts of immigration detention on individuals, family and social networks, and wider communities?*
- *There is currently no time limit on immigration detention – in your view what are the impacts (if any) of this?*
- *Are the current arrangements for authorizing detention appropriate?*
- *What are the wider consequences of the current immigration detention system, including any financial and/or social implications?*
- *How effective are the current UK alternatives to detention (e.g. bail, reporting requirements)? Are viable alternatives to immigration detention in operation in other countries?*

## **6. Before you begin...**

Before you start the process of gathering evidence as a group, we recommend that you think about the following issues (in addition to general good practice rules for hosting a meeting, such as conducting a meeting in a quiet space, providing comfort breaks, appointing a note taker etc).

- If your group includes people with experience of detention, be aware that it might not be easy for them to talk about their experiences in front of others. Make sure that they are informed of what will be happening during the session in advance, and *never* force or pressurise people into sharing information that they are not comfortable about sharing.
- Because of the above, it is extremely important for you to consider who should be invited to such a session. Should it only be people your group is familiar with? How do you make sure that people in the group feel comfortable with each other?
- Set clear ground rules that ensure that the session will take place in a safe environment where everyone's privacy and dignity are respected. For example, you might need to make it very clear that anything discussed during the session remains confidential to the group and that everyone is given space to participate and allowed to disagree.
- People experience things differently. Please value each person's different perspectives as much as possible. This might make it challenging to 'summarise' people's views.

- Manage people's expectations. The panel will receive many submissions and is unlikely to be able to address every point that your submission will raise. You might also, as a group, request to speak at the oral hearing sessions. This might not happen for one reason or another. Make sure that people participate in the session knowing this.
- At the end of the session, be clear about what the next step is. Will you be circulating the draft submission for approval before it gets sent? Will it contain the participant's names?

## 7. What should we include in a submission document?

The Parliamentary webpage [here](#) has useful guidelines to bear in mind when making a submission. Although the guidelines are aimed at people making submissions to a select committee, many of them are still relevant. We reproduce the key points below.

- State clearly who the submission is from, i.e. whether from yourself in a personal capacity or sent on behalf of an organisation, for example the submission could be headed 'Written evidence submitted by xxxxxx'
- Be concise (the Detention Inquiry Panel word limit for written submissions is 3,000 words)
- Begin with an executive summary in bullet point form of the main points made in the submission
- Include a brief introduction about yourself/your organisation and your reason for submitting evidence
- Have numbered paragraphs
- Include any factual information you have to offer from which the committee might be able to draw conclusions, or which could be put to other witnesses for their reactions
- Include any recommendations for action by the Government or others which you would like the committee to consider.

In addition, the Detention Forum suggests you may want to include the following information to the submission document.

- Your relationship to people whose views you are capturing in the submission. Perhaps you can include a brief profile of those people such as:
  1. the number of people whom you spoke to prepare the submission (check also if they want to have their names listed in the document)
  2. the lengths/locations of their detention (if you are involving people with experience of detention)
  3. their experience of working with people in detention (if you are involving people with experience of working with people in detention)
  4. their relationship to people who are experiencing/experienced detention (if you are involving families, friends and community members of people with experience of detention)
- Whether your organisation (with or without people who took part in this exercise) wants to be invited to give evidence at oral evidence sessions

## 8. What do we want to see changed?

If you want to influence the panel, it is very important that you make recommendations to the panel, and not just list problems and concerns. If you are gathering evidence in a group setting, allow time for both sharing concerns AND coming up with solutions, and try to structure both these elements into your plan for the session. A group setting can lead to useful and informative

discussions which help the group come up with recommendations, as they can think together what should change. Equally, it might not be easy to agree on recommendations – so you should have a strategy for dealing with such a situation. You may want to summarise the main areas of agreement and disagreement, or you may want to list all the different views that the participants have.

To give you a sense of what 'recommendations' might mean in this context, here is an example. In the Detention Forum, our key recommendations are as follows. There are many more possible recommendations, but these are the ones that we are focussing on.

- The government should introduce a time limit on immigration detention.
- Vulnerable people should not be detained.
- There should be improved judicial oversight of detention.

If you want to know more about each of these recommendations, please get in touch with us.

You can also refer to existing research and reports to back up your recommendations if you want. If you want further guidance on this, please get in touch with us.

## **9. We want to say something different...**

If there are other issues which are not covered by the questions set by the inquiry panel that your group wants to highlight, you should go ahead and do so. The panel might not address them but they will at least know that there are other issues that people are concerned about. Add your own evidence!

## **10. Sub-questions**

Each question that the panel wants evidence on is a big question, so you might want to break it down to several different sub questions. This could be useful if people get 'stuck' for an answer or don't know where to start. These sub-questions might clarify what you are asking and help people consider things they have not thought about before. We list some examples of sub-questions below. You might not need them, or you might have better sub-questions.

These sub-questions could help in a 'semi-structured interview' style setting. However, these sub-questions can also 'skew' the views of those who are participating. Be careful what you ask and make sure you give people space to answer the big questions in a way they want to, too. You might learn something new.

The questions asked by the inquiry panel are in italics. Suggested sub-questions are provided in bullet points. If you can think of other useful sub-questions, let us know.

*What are your views on the current conditions within UK immigration detention centres, including detainees' access to advice and services? Please highlight any areas where you think that improvements could be made.*

- You could discuss access to legal advice, healthcare, pastoral care, phones, fax machine, computers, internet, posts, 'work', interpreters etc. You could also discuss how people in detention can or cannot get help for their mental, physical or emotional problems.

- Are the rooms comfortable? Are people in detention able to live with dignity and respect? Can you give examples?
- What do/did you think about the process of being detained? How did it happen and was it appropriate?
- What do you think of the physical environment of detention centres? Is the level of security appropriate?
- Are there any differences between different centres? What are they? Anything about the use of 'segregation'?
- Please also remember that many people are also held as immigration detainees in prisons. What are the conditions like in prisons?
- Will improvements make detention 'okay'?

*How far does the current detention system support the needs of vulnerable detainees, including pregnant women, detainees with a disability and young adults?*

- There is meant to be a mechanism called Rule 35 which prevents detention of vulnerable people. However, many NGOs are concerned that this mechanism is not working. What is your view? Did you meet any vulnerable people in detention? Were you vulnerable yourself?
- Vulnerability is a difficult concept to define and detention itself can make people vulnerable. Can you give examples of why this might be? How about when you do not speak English very well? Elderly people? Unfamiliar with the immigration system? People who are ill? Being separated from your support network?
- Should vulnerable people be detained at all?

*What are the impacts of immigration detention on individuals, family and social networks, and wider communities?*

- It's worth remembering that around one in three people who are detained later get released back into the community. How does experience of detention affect these people's ability to integrate in the UK society? How do they feel about Britain? Is there any long-term impact that people who are released into the community experience?
- Many people fear detention (for example, at reporting). How does it affect them?
- Many families and friends are separated by detention. Is it easy to maintain relationships?
- How do communities or friends support people in detention? How do they view detention?
- Does the image of 'detention' make the general public think of immigrants as criminals? (Note, however, that some people in detention are ex-offenders: i.e. people who have served their criminal sentences. Their human rights and civil liberties also need to be respected.)
- When people leave detention and return to their community, what sort of help is available? How does it address their emotional, physical or mental issues which were caused by detention?

There is currently no time limit on immigration detention – in your view what are the impacts (if any) of this?

- Does not knowing when you will be leaving detention have a particular impact on you/communities?
- How did you cope with not knowing when you might be released?
- Should there be a time limit on detention? Why? How long should it be?

Are the current arrangements for authorizing detention appropriate?

- Are the decisions to detain and/or release made fairly and appropriately?
- When you were detained, did you feel that you should not be detained? If so, why?
- Did you apply for bail? Or have you observed a bail hearing? What was your experience like?

What are the wider consequences of the current immigration detention system, including any financial and/or social implications?

- Detention costs almost £50,000 per person per year. Do you think that it is a good use of the tax-payer's money?
- What do you think detention does to your community (of individuals, like-minded people)?

How effective are the current UK alternatives to detention (e.g. bail, reporting requirements)? Are realistic alternatives to immigration detention in operation in other countries?

- Many people get released back in to the community and are living there released on bail or with reporting conditions. What does it feel like to be on bail? To report? Can you engage with the immigration system and pursue your case when you are on bail?
- What support is there for people released into the community? How do community organisations help these people? Is it better to be in the community like this rather than in detention? Why?

### **11. Other tips for capturing your evidence...**

- How about capturing the collective length of immigration detention of your group, by adding up the number of days that your group members spent in detention? For example, if Jack spent 20 days in detention, Ahmed spent 60 days in detention and Katie spent 30 days in detention, the group members have collectively spent 110 days in detention.
- Many people who have experienced long-term detention have stayed in many different detention centres. How about listing all the detention centres your group members have been to?
- If you have a large group of participants who want to give evidence, you could set up different tables with different questions to answer. People can choose which desks to go to give evidence. For example, you could have a table to discuss conditions, another to talk about the length of detention, and another one dedicated to women's experiences etc. Possibilities are endless, but make sure someone is writing down the evidence that is provided at each table.

## **AMPLIFY THE IMPACT OF YOUR SUBMISSION - HOST A LOCAL 'HEARING' OR PUBLIC MEETING**

### **1. Why should we do this?**

We are encouraging all groups to consider hosting a local 'hearing' or public meeting to share the submission/evidence, so that other local asylum, refugee and migrant groups, MPs, Prospective Parliamentary Candidates, Local Councillors, Trade Unions, local Amnesty groups, student groups and race equality groups and others become more knowledgeable about the reality of immigration detention. It is also a great opportunity to draw attention to the detention inquiry and, particularly, encourage MPs to take action on detention. It is vital that the panel and the MPs understand that detention has an impact not just in detention centres but throughout the UK.

### **2. When should we do this?**

The deadline for written submission is 1 October. You can host an event before or after 1 October but it definitely makes sense to do it before the inquiry report is published (January 2015). It is probably advisable to do this after the submission has been completed so that you actually have a concrete document to refer to (and can even give people copies of it at the event!). You will probably need to plan the event while you are working on the submission.

### **3. What things should we consider before committing to do this?**

You need to consider carefully whether your group wants to do this or not.

- Any event takes a lot of time to organise. To make an event a success, relevant people need to be invited and encouraged to come well in advance of the event. Someone needs to design a flyer. Someone needs to chair the meeting. Also someone should write up the minutes of the event or a report of the event (this could be supplied by the Detention Forum – if you need this help, please contact us.) Basically, it will require a lot of co-ordination.
- There are likely to be some financial costs involved, such as venue, refreshments and travel expenses.
- You need to check that people who were involved in preparing the submission are happy with having an event which will feature the document.

### **4. What geographical area should such an event cover?**

It might be a good idea to cover a relatively large geographical area so that you can engage a larger number of MPs and other relevant individuals and groups. You should also consider hosting the event jointly with other like-minded groups in the local area so that 1) you can share the tasks and costs and 2) you can invite a wider range of groups, individuals and MPs to the event.

### **5. Who should be invited?**

- People who were involved in preparing the submission, their friends and supporters. They really need to be thanked for providing evidence – but check whether they want to be

acknowledged in public. They might prefer to remain anonymous for confidentiality reasons.

- Local asylum, refugee, migrant groups and their supporters.
- Local Black Minority Ethnic groups and other voluntary sector organisations and their supporters.
- Faith communities.
- Trade Union branches.
- Local Amnesty, student and race equality groups.
- Local councillors.
- Local MPs (to cast the net wide, you can work with organisations based in different constituencies to approach their local MPs).
- Local Prospective Parliamentary Candidates.

## **6. What should the event cover?**

The basic event could include the following, but you can be creative and try to make it more interactive. You can also combine it with another theme that is important to your group, or show a short film during the event to make it lively. At one of the recent Detention Forum event, we asked the participants to share their thoughts about detention using questions such as ‘What does freedom mean to you?’, ‘What do you think you will miss most if you were detained?’ which made it more interactive.

- explain the detention inquiry
- share the key summary of the submission
- invite someone who participated in the evidence gathering session to share his/her personal experience
- invite one of the organisations to speak about their view
- explain what you think should happen
- Q & A
- explain what you want people to do after the meeting

## **7. Engaging your MP. What if our MP doesn’t show up?**

The Party conference season starts at the end of September (Conservatives: 28 Sep to 1 Oct, Labour: 21 – 24 Sep, Lib Dems: 4 – 8 October), so you might like to avoid these times to maximise the chance of your local MP attending the event. Find out if there are people locally who already have a good relationship with the MP, and see if they can help you with getting the MP to come along. MPs are very busy, so give them plenty of notice about the event.

If the MP does not show up, you and other people who are at the event can all agree to write an open letter to him/her, asking to read the submission and comment on it. You can even make an appointment at the MP’s surgery to talk to him/her about the submission directly.

## **8. Publicity?**

Ideally, you should let people know about the event at least a month in advance, but preferably longer. You could also invite your local newspaper to the event to see if they can cover it. You should also make sure your friends, supporters and contacts know that this is happening.

At the Detention Forum, we have a nifty (and easy to download) message template you can use to create a 'selfie' which will be available on our website soon. If you want to see it, please email us at [detentionforum@gmail.com](mailto:detentionforum@gmail.com) If you send or tweet your selfie with your message to us (@DetentionForum), we could also publicise it on our website and also on Twitter. We will also be collecting news on what's happening locally during the detention inquiry, so please keep us informed if possible.

### 9. How much does it cost?

You should consider the following financial costs if you are hosting an event.

- Venue hire
- Equipment hire (such as speakers, microphone, projectors.)
- Refreshments
- Travel expenses for people who cannot afford to pay

If you plan everything in advance, you might be able to reduce the costs. For example, is there a friendly community organisation or a church which can let you use the venue for free? Are there art/music groups who can lend you the equipment for free? If money is tight, you could ask people to bring food to share, instead of buying food?



## **YOU THINK YOU HAVE BETTER IDEAS? SHARE WITH US!**

As we said earlier, although we have written this guide, we are not the experts. So if you have better ideas that you think should be shared, please let us know so that we can pass the message far and wide for the benefit of other groups.

We hope you have found this guide useful. Please also see the forthcoming 'The guide for individuals' as well.

Lastly, the Detention Forum will be running our exciting Twitter project called 'Unlocking Detention – a Twitter tour of the UK detention estate' from September to December. We hope you can take part by following us on Twitter. See you on Twitter!

**Prepared by the Detention Forum  
28 July 2011**

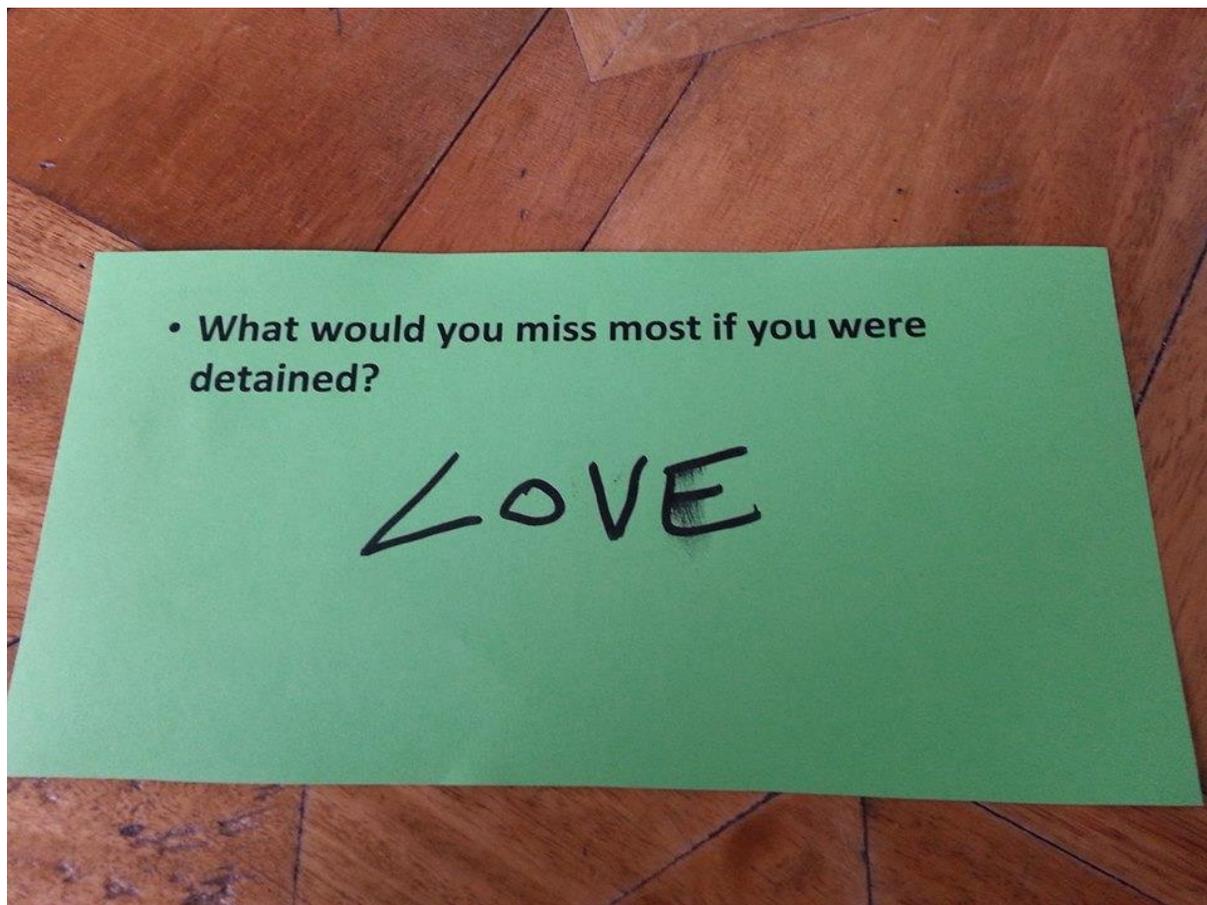


Photo by the Detention Forum – at the workshop held in July 2014