

# Training Guide



## Immigration Detention: Becoming a Visitor Volunteer in the DC/MD/VA Area

Version 3.5

*\*Many thanks to Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) and those who contributed to the development of this training manual.*

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## **The Purpose of This Manual**

The purpose of this manual is to provide information and guidelines to assist the visitors who work as volunteers as part of DC DVN. We hope this manual answers some of your questions about your important role in being a visitor to immigrants in detention.

### **I. The DC Detention Visitation Network**

We are members of DC, Maryland, and Virginia communities who are concerned with trends towards more intensive, more local, and more punitive enforcement of immigration laws. We provide friendship and support through social visits and letters to people who are detained by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in Maryland and Virginia.

#### **What Visitation Volunteers Do**

One of the most important things we can do as concerned community members to assist immigrants in detention, especially those with no friends or family nearby who can visit them, is to simply be a friend. Friendship that affirms humanity in the midst of a dehumanizing scenario and provides emotional support is one of detained immigrants' greatest needs. We match volunteers with people in detention who have requested visits and pen pals, and facilitate in-person social visits to detention centers. Volunteers do not have any assignments or agenda: they simply sit and talk with detainees as any friend would.

According to Jack Gibbs, author of "Four Problem Areas of Pre-Trial Detention," "the rapid transition to detention is deeply unsettling. It can result in confusion, distortions of reality, withdrawal, apathy, and ultimately, psychological breakdown." A friendly visitor can help someone facing this scenario cope with the stress and isolation of detention, and be a link to the "outside." A visitor's presence ensures the person who is detained that he or she is not forgotten. Gibbs also noted that, "support in the community may be a 'stability zone' which softens the psychological impact of confinement."

In addition to the psychological impact of detention, many detained immigrants have previously experienced psychologically stressful conditions, and may be recovering from torture, human trafficking, and other instances of trauma. Under these circumstances, it is extremely important for individuals to have a positive person in their lives and to establish a meaningful relationship in the absence of support when friends and family cannot visit.

"Surveys typically show that boredom is one of the most common and damaging problems in detention. Unable to alleviate tension, trauma, and anxiety through activity, the [detained immigrant's] boredom may reinforce these feelings," Gibbs writes. Visits give individuals in detention a break from the boredom and serve to boost their morale and help them refocus their emotions on positive relationships. Visits have been proven to help people who are incarcerated: one study by the Minnesota Department of Corrections found that any visitation at all, even just once, reduced the risk of criminal inmates committing a future felony by 13%, and reduced the likelihood of violating parole conditions by 25%.

In addition to providing compassion, an open mind, and willingness to listen, visitors receive a great benefit from visiting immigrants in detention. Through this experience, visitors develop a deeper sense of the struggles that others face and witness the powerful role that they may have in creating change for one person and the world around them with a simple smile, interest, and conversation.

## **II. Immigration Detention: An Overview**

### **Who Are Immigration Detainees?**

People who are in the custody of US Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) – as many as 40,000-45,000 individuals across the country on any given night – come from all walks of life and parts of the world. Each person has been charged as deportable (a civil, not criminal, charge), but there are many and varied circumstances that can lead to such a charge. Some people arrive at our borders fleeing persecution and seeking asylum, and must be detained according to law unless they can meet difficult criteria to qualify for release. Undocumented immigrants and people who have overstayed visas may be detained for that reason alone, or because they have been charged with a crime, even a minor misdemeanor such as driving without a license (a virtual necessity since a 2005 change in the law made it impossible for undocumented people in many states to obtain a driver's license). Often, people who are legally present in the US but who receive criminal convictions are subject to detention and deportation.

However they have come to be in detention, immigration detainees are not statistics or archetypes, but people first. Many have U.S. citizen and legal immigrant spouses, children, parents, siblings, and other family and friends they will be forced to leave behind if deported. Indeed, due to strict bars to reentry for certain deportees, many or most may never be able to return to the U.S. again if deported. Many worry desperately for the welfare of families who, wherever they are, depended upon them financially and emotionally. Each detainee suffers in ways that not even long-term criminal inmates do: immigration detainees endure the anxiety that comes from not knowing how long incarceration will last, and do not receive the same legal protections, in-prison programming and resources that people serving criminal sentences do.

For more background information on the immigration detention system, see the [Detention Watch Network's](http://detentionwatchnetwork.org) website, or visit the Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Services (LIRS) website at <http://lirs.org/act/visitation/>.

### **Terminology**

U.S. immigration law often refers to non-citizens as “aliens.” Non-citizens fall into two legal categories: immigrants and non-immigrants. The basic difference between these two groups of non-citizens is their intent and ability to remain in the United States on a permanent basis. Those who intend to remain permanently or indefinitely are “immigrants.” Those who intend to remain for a brief period of time or for a certain, discreet purpose are “non-immigrants.”

Many additional terms have been created and are used to describe non-citizens who are present in the United States. In an effort to clarify some of these terms, we have briefly defined the most common ones below.

#### ***LEGAL IMMIGRANTS***

Legal immigrants are people born outside the United States who have been lawfully admitted to the United States for permanent residence. Legal immigrants are often referred to as “LPRs” or “green card holders.” These immigrants have the opportunity to become U.S. citizens after a certain time period, or they may maintain their LPR status indefinitely. In essence, LPRs have the same rights and obligations as a U.S. citizen with the exceptions of voting, holding certain public offices and employment by federal agencies in civil service positions; however, legal permanent residents can still be detained and even deported.

#### ***LEGAL NON-IMMIGRANTS***

Legal non-immigrants have been lawfully admitted to the United States for a specific purpose (e.g. work or study), but only for a temporary stay that will end when its purpose has been accomplished. Someone

in this status who stays longer than the time permitted by their non-immigrant visa is considered to have “fallen out of status,” and may be subject to detention and/or deportation.

### ***MIGRANT WORKERS***

Migrant workers move from one region or country to another in search of employment, and may or may not have legal status in the United States.

### ***CRIMINAL ALIENS***

Criminal aliens are non-citizens who have committed a crime and may be subject to deportation. The immigration laws of the United States are extremely strict when it comes to criminal convictions for non-citizens. Even very minor crimes or misdemeanors can become deportable offenses for non-immigrants and lawful permanent residents alike.

### ***UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS (sometimes referred to as “Illegals”)***

Undocumented immigrants are persons in the United States without valid immigration documents and may have “entered without inspection (EWI)” or fallen out of status. It is estimated that there are approximately 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States.

### ***REFUGEES***

Refugees are persons outside their homeland who are unable or unwilling to return because of a well-founded fear of persecution due to their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Each year, a certain number of refugees are selected by the U.S. State Department to undergo rigorous security screenings and enter the United States through the Refugee Resettlement Program. One year after arriving in the United States, a refugee can apply for Lawful Permanent Residency (LPR).

### ***ASYLUM SEEKERS***

Asylum seekers are a type of refugee, and can seek protection in the United States for the same reasons as a refugee. While refugees are resettled in the U.S., asylum seekers must make their own way here and ask for protection either when they arrive, or after they have already entered the United States. Though harsh, United States law requires that all asylum seekers who ask for protection at an airport or other point of entry be immediately detained. The detention of asylum seekers is mandatory, and while release for this vulnerable population is within the discretion of ICE, many asylum seekers remain detained while they fight their immigration cases.

### ***ASYLEES***

Asylees are people who have been granted asylum in the United States due to persecution faced in their native country on account of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. Immediately after being granted asylum, asylees are authorized to work in the United States. One year after being granted asylum in the United States, an asylee can apply for Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR) status, and after five years as an LPR he or she can apply for U.S. citizenship.

### ***PAROLEES***

Parolees are non-citizens to whom the Attorney General has granted temporary entry into the United States for humanitarian or public interest purposes. Parolee status expires after one year (renewable at the U.S. government’s discretion), and most parolees are prohibited from applying for LPR status or citizenship. Parolees can be detained at any time.

## ***Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)***

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is the bureau within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which enforces immigration laws and administers the apprehension, detention, and deportation of immigrants.

## ***CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES (CIS or USCIS)***

Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) is the bureau within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) that administers applications for immigration benefits such as visas, adjustment of status, and naturalization. The Asylum Corps in USCIS makes decisions on affirmative asylum claims.

## ***BOARD OF IMMIGRATION APPEALS (BIA)***

The Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) is the highest administrative body within the Department of Justice that interprets and applies immigration laws. The BIA hears appeals regarding decisions made by Immigration Judges (IJs). These decisions are binding unless overturned by the Attorney General (AG) or a Federal Circuit Court.

## ***EXECUTIVE OFFICE FOR IMMIGRATION REVIEW (EOIR)***

The Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) is the agency within the Department of Justice (DOJ) that administers all Immigration Courts in the United States, as well as the BIA. These courts are administered by the Department of Justice in order to create a veneer of separation between the trial attorneys who prosecute deportation cases (who are employees of DHS and ICE) and the adjudicators (who work for DOJ and EOIR).

## **About Immigration Detention**

The immigration laws of the United States are very complex. Due to this complexity, this training manual cannot and does not attempt to describe all of the ways in which a person can be granted or denied immigration status in the United States.

As a volunteer, you are encouraged and welcome to ask questions as they arise, and a basic understanding of immigration laws and processes will likely help you in your conversations with detainees. However, it is important to remind yourself and any detained person that you may encounter that you are not his or her attorney and that you are not qualified to provide any legal advice during your visits. Because our organization is not equipped with malpractice insurance and necessary administrative support, we ask you to abstain from providing legal advice to people you meet through our program even if you are a licensed attorney. You can tell detainees that you are happy to assist with information that may lead them to qualified legal assistance, and as a visitation volunteer, you will be provided with this sort of information.

There are generally three paths to securing authorization to stay in the U.S.: family-based visas, employment-based visas, and humanitarian assistance. People with family-based visas are immediate relatives of U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents, or in some cases are joining a spouse or parent who has a temporary visa to work or study in the U.S. Those with employment-based visas are, of course, approved to work (or study) in the U.S., often in fields or positions for which there are not enough qualified U.S. citizen applicants. Beneficiaries of humanitarian immigration policies include refugees and asylum seekers fleeing persecution in their home countries, and people who secure short-term authorization to stay in the U.S. for medical treatment or other urgent personal needs.

Just as there are multiple paths to immigration status, there are multiple avenues to detention. People in detention include individuals who do and do not have visas; people who are encountering immigration enforcement for the first time in addition to others who may have been ordered deported or actually sent

out of the country on previous occasions; women and men; and both adults and children. (At present, we only visit adult facilities.)

There are two agencies within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) that are tasked with apprehension and detention of non-citizens. These agencies are Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). CBP has authority to inspect, apprehend and detain individuals who apply for entry into the U.S. at a port of entry (airport, border checkpoint) or are found within 100 miles of a border of the United States or have been present in the U.S. for less than fourteen days. CBP does not detain individuals on a long-term basis and should not normally hold an individual for longer than a 48 to 72 hour period. CBP will instead transfer custody of an individual to ICE if s/he is to remain in custody. ICE is tasked with apprehension of non-citizens within the interior of the United States, as well as the longer-term detention of these individuals. In addition, once it has been determined that a person should be removed from the United States, ICE is responsible for arranging that removal (or “deportation”) to the individual’s home country.

Thus, a person could find himself in detention as a result of encountering CBP along the border, or for identifying himself at a port of entry. This is true whether or not the non-citizen has a valid visa (CBP has the authority to revoke a visa, as well as to deny entry into the United States on a discretionary basis). In addition, asylum seekers (who identify themselves as such at a border or port of entry into the country) are subject to mandatory detention and will be transferred into ICE custody for the duration of the time it takes for an immigration judge to adjudicate the asylum claim.

Alternatively, a person could find herself in detention as a result of encountering an ICE official within the interior of the United States. This could happen as a result of a random stop in the street, a workplace raid, or because local police report the non-citizen’s presence to ICE. This last scenario became more and more common in recent years as local and state officials were engaged in immigration enforcement efforts through programs such as Secure Communities, the Criminal Alien Program, and 287(g) agreements that required local law enforcement to report non-citizens to ICE, or provided incentives to do so. Some jurisdictions have resisted these efforts out of concern about potential constitutional violations, unreimbursed costs, and decreased effectiveness of their operations in immigrant communities.

Lastly, some individuals in immigration detention are transferred there after completing a criminal sentence. Once the sentence has been served, jail officials will notify ICE that the non-citizen is no longer required to remain in the jail’s custody. ICE officials may then place a detainer on the person, which is a request to hold the person for 48 hours while ICE arranges to come and pick the person up. Unfortunately, ICE often fails to come within the allotted time period, resulting in the illegal extended detention of non-citizens after their criminal sentences are complete; however, there are some legal remedies for this situation, including the filing of a habeas corpus petition.

Once ICE takes a non-citizen into custody, the person will either have a hearing with an immigration judge to determine removability or, if there is already a final order of removal on record, the non-citizen will be subject to something called “reinstatement of removal” or “administrative removal.” Reinstatement is exactly what it sounds like: the non-citizen has already had a chance to fight his or her immigration case, has been determined to be removable, and already has a final order of deportation. Administrative removal is different, in that the non-citizen does not get to see a judge, but because of his or her criminal history, an ICE officer can determine that the non-citizen is removable. If this happens, the non-citizen is given a final order of deportation and does not have a chance to fight his or her case.

Understandably, some people are hesitant to interact with “criminals.” However, very minor crimes—often non-violent, traffic, or misdemeanor violations—are enough to render a non-citizen removable. Additionally, more and more “criminal aliens” are being removed after having been convicted for “illegal entry” or “illegal reentry,” federal charges that are very vigorously prosecuted around the country, and simply mean that the person attempted to enter the United States without permission. Even those individuals who have been convicted of more serious offenses are often people who support and are valued members of American families, and who have also contributed positively to our country, or who are determined to do so in the future if they have the opportunity. Thus, we ask that you keep an open

mind and open heart when speaking to detainees who may have experienced criminal detention as well as immigration detention. These people have already paid for their crimes, and often are confused about having to go to jail all over again—this time with no final date for release in sight.

### **Life in Detention**

Most people in Department of Homeland Security custody live in institutions built, and often operated, as jails or prisons intended to be punitive. They do not have access to very much support nor to very many activities, but some limited services are available.

Family visits may be difficult or rare. This is because the facilities can be remotely located, the visiting hours are often limited, the detainee may not have family in the area or those family members may not have immigration status themselves. Sometimes, parents find it very difficult for their children to see them behind bars, and do not want to expose them to the harsh and intimidating experience of entering a detention facility. Thus, your visit as a volunteer may be some of the only non-government or non-penal contact that a detainee might have.

Sometimes detainees are housed in “pods,” where they are assigned to shared cells that are arranged around a central common-area. In this instance, detainees may be confined to their cells for 20+ hours per day, with limited access to the common area and the outdoors. They often must eat their meals in their cells.

Other detainees are housed in a “warehouse”-like setting, where rows and rows of bunk-beds are set up in a common room. These detainees do not have private space of any kind, and often eat, sleep, shower, and recreate in the same space.

Immigration detainees may find themselves in a mixed population, meaning that they are living alongside convicted (and sometimes violent) criminals. This can be a very intimidating experience for a person who has not been convicted of a crime in the past, nor perhaps has ever even been inside of a jail prior to encountering immigration authorities. In these populations there can often be hierarchies, cliques, language barriers, and other situations that can result in dangerous or isolating situations for immigration detainees.

We mention these things so that you can try to imagine what the daily life of a detainee could be like. There are many other things about detention—like being woken up at any hour of day or night without explanation, appearing before judges over tele-video, transfer to any location in the country without warning, sudden deportation, or not knowing if or when you will be released—that can make it a traumatic experience. Through our visitation network and through the resources listed below, we have the opportunity to make a positive difference in the otherwise difficult lives of immigration detainees.

Services that may, or should, be available to people you encounter in immigration detention include:

- **Legal screenings:** Residents of the facilities you may visit receive periodic visits from the Capitol Area Immigrants’ Rights (CAIR) Coalition, which provides presentations on legal rights and individual case screenings. DVN will generally refer any legal questions or concerns to the CAIR Coalition.
- **Chaplains:** Chaplains help detainees cope with the stress of immigration detention. Often, those detained experience anxiety, hopelessness, isolation, depression, and strained relationships with family or friends. In a time of great crisis, many detainees find comfort and solace in their respective faith traditions.

The law stipulates that detention facilities shall accommodate all sincerely held forms of religious practice. Chaplains provide religious services in an ecumenical, non-proselytizing manner. The role of the chaplain is to facilitate the religious observances of detainees within the constraints of the facility’s need to maintain good order, operation, and security. In practice, this means chaplains schedule worship services, assist with accommodating religious diets, supply requested religious property (i.e., sacred



texts, prayer beads, religious headwear, etc.), plan the celebration of religious holidays, conduct pastoral counseling, and coordinate visits from outside clergy. To learn more about immigration detention chaplaincy, you can visit the Jesuit Refugee Service's Religious Services Guide at [www.jrsusa.org/rsg](http://www.jrsusa.org/rsg).

- **Outlets for reporting concerns:** People in detention should be able to contact free of charge multiple institutions that monitor conditions in detention and address emergency situations, including the American Bar Association's Commission on Immigration and the Department of Homeland Security's Office of the Inspector General. Detention guidelines prohibit retaliation against detainees for requesting assistance, regardless of outcome. Detention centers should provide instructions for contacting these and possibly additional independent agencies.
- **Consulates:** Immigrants in custody must be permitted to contact the Embassy or a Consulate of their home country free of charge. In practice, individuals may have a difficult time reaching Embassy/Consulate staff, however.
- **Law Library:** Detention centers are required to provide access to legal reference materials. In practice, the quality and degree of access to law libraries varies greatly from facility to facility.
- **Mental and physical health care:** Every detention center has contractual responsibility for providing all medically indicated health care that people in their custody require. Detention centers also must provide access to mental health care. Again, the actual quality and degree of access to health care varies widely in different facilities.

### **Immigration Detention Facilities in Our Area**

There are currently no immigration detention facilities within the borders of Washington, D.C. Instead, most people who are apprehended in our area are sent to various detention facilities in rural Virginia or Maryland. These facilities are all contract facilities, which means that they are not owned by ICE, but instead, are local jails or private facilities where ICE rents bed-space.

Anyone who is apprehended in Virginia or at Dulles International Airport is usually sent to a Virginia-based facility until his or her case is resolved (either in court, or by deportation). Detainees who have an opportunity to go to court will appear by tele-video to the Arlington Immigration Court, which has jurisdiction over the state of Virginia. Currently, there is one principal jail in Virginia that houses adult immigration detainees:

#### **ICA-Farmville (private/for profit)**

Location: Farmville, VA

Distance from Washington, DC: 170 miles

Number of Detainees: over 500

Male and Female detainees

Non-citizens apprehended in Maryland or at BWI are detained in in Maryland, but are sometimes transferred to another detention facility within the United States before their cases are completed. The Baltimore Immigration Court has jurisdiction over these cases until the individual is transferred outside of the state of Maryland. ICE contracted jails in Maryland include:

#### **Frederick County Detention Center (government run)**

Location: Frederick, MD

Distance from Washington, DC: 50 miles

Number of Detainees: around 50

Male and Female Detainees



**Howard County Detention Center (government run)**

Location: Jessup, MD

Distance from Washington, DC: 30 miles

Number of Detainees: around 75

Male and Female detainees



**Ordinance Road Correctional Center (government run)**

Location: Glen Burnie, MD

Distance from Washington, DC:

37 miles

Number of Detainees: 20 at opening – capacity is 130

Male Detainees

**Worcester County Jail (government run)**

Location: Snow Hill, MD

Distance from Washington, DC: 140 miles

Number of Detainees: around 180

Male and Female detainees

### **III. Becoming a Visitation Volunteer**

A volunteer is an invited guest. We are there to support, respect, and nurture the individual as a friend and not to cause them more confusion or distress.

#### **Do I qualify to be a volunteer?**

- Visitors must have valid government-issued identification with a photograph (in order to gain entrance to detention facilities).
- You must be at least 18 years of age. A minor is only allowed if accompanied by a parent or legal guardian.
- A past misdemeanor or felony conviction may disqualify you for service. Please inquire with DC DVN staff.
- You must be aware of your surroundings with adequate vision and hearing. You must be able to evacuate a detention facility without assistance in the event of an emergency. People who cannot meet these requirements can support detainees in other roles, such as by writing letters and sending reading materials.
- You must have enough fluency in English to take directions from detention center officers and make yourself understood to officers and staff.
- We recommend that people who may be at risk of being charged as deportable not participate in in-person visits to detention centers. While we would not prohibit it and have heard reports of undocumented people safely visiting, we are concerned that we could not guarantee the safety and liberty of anyone at risk in the detention environment, with an ICE presence a possibility.

#### **How do I become a Visitor Volunteer?**

DC DVN Visitor Volunteers must complete the full DC DVN training program, which consists of one session. DC DVN requests the visitor to be consistent in his/her visits with detained immigrants, with interest in making 1 visit per month for a period of at least 4 months.

Detainees will request a visitor and DC DVN will connect the volunteer with the detainee for the first visit.

#### **What is NOT expected of visitor volunteers?**

A visitor is NOT a lawyer to help someone figure out how to get out of detention, NOT a mental health professional, NOT a social worker, NOT a reporter, NOT a missionary trying to convert detained immigrants, and NOT a source of financial support. Nevertheless, a visitor can help detained immigrants contact organizations that can provide legal, medical, psychological, or other assistance. Program leaders can help visitor volunteers locate these resources.

#### **Positive Effects of Visiting Individuals in Detention**

When you become a visitor volunteer, people in detention are not the only ones who benefit. Volunteers grow in their understanding of themselves and others, in their compassion for all people, and in their knowledge of our nation's immigration system and its impact on American and immigrant families alike. Following are some testimonies from experienced visitors.

*"My experience visiting detained asylum seekers during the past five years has opened my eyes to the suffering of these most vulnerable people held for months, sometimes years, in detention centers and jails across the United States."* - **David Fraccaro, Executive Director of FaithAction International House, Greensboro, NC**

*"I have changed myself so much, because it is really a great feeling to give unconditional love to someone in need, to someone who does not have another human being to care for them, to make them laugh in these hard difficult times, and to tell them stories about the weather, or family and kids."* - **Melfi, Visitor Volunteer, New Jersey**

*“What I didn’t expect was that I, too, would get so much out of this program. These visits have allowed me into a different world of both hope and sadness. So many people suffer terribly in their own countries, and leave their homes and families to seek safety and freedom in the United States, only to end up in immigration detention. It is humbling to get to know a few of them. Learning about [their experiences] has enabled me to tell others...so hopefully they will be moved to do something about it, since with knowledge comes the possibility of change. While I continue to hope that my visits help the detained immigrants that I come to know, I know that they have enriched my life beyond what I’d ever imagined.”* - **Deborah Cooper, Visitor Volunteer, New York**

*“I believe the moments in that jail are sacred moments with those people. We give them life, and they give us life. It’s a mutual thing. It’s a human exchange, but I believe that God is present in that.”* - **Sister Pat Murphy, Interfaith Committee for Detained Immigrants, Chicago**

*“In theory, I knew a lot about detention. But the reality – I really didn’t know the reality of immigration detention.”* - **Ruben Loyo, Volunteer with Middlesex (NJ) First Friends**

## **IV. Working as a Volunteer**

### **Support for Volunteers**

As a volunteer, you will be provided with:

- Consistent advice and support from DC DVN's leaders and community. DC DVN's leaders will be in continuous communications with volunteers and will address any concerns that arise promptly.
- Transportation to and from detention centers where possible. DC DVN will aim to provide at least once-monthly scheduled transportation between central locations in Washington, DC and Baltimore and each of the detention centers we serve.
- DC DVN also hopes to provide visitor volunteers with a range of multidisciplinary experiences that provide them with an opportunity for dialogue on social issues and societal injustices relevant to migration with a focus on migration-related detention. These will include small group and panel discussion sessions, opportunities to attend local and national conferences, and monthly calls with Freedom for Immigrants, LIRS, and other national organizations that support immigration detention visitation programs.

### **Principles and Guidelines for Volunteers**

We encourage you to keep in mind these considerations and principles during your visits:

- Visitors are simply friends: you provide social support and companionship. Your role is not to provide legal or logistical assistance, and you should not feel bad about not being able to help with everything your detained friends may request, or need. Being a friend is enough, and is valuable.
- Make a conscious effort to be friendly and sympathetic, and to avoid judgmental commentary. You'll help buoy your detained friends' spirits by being positive and supportive.
- Recognize your position of privilege and the power dynamics at play during your visit. You and your detained friends are all regular people, but only you have freedom of movement and the peace of mind that comes from knowing you cannot be uprooted against your will. You are unavoidably in a position of power when you visit a detention center, and by being conscious of this imbalance of power you can take proactive steps to make your friends more comfortable, and to place the power in their hands in small but important ways (by asking, for example, "what would you like to talk about today?").
- Because you as a visitor hold more power and privilege than your detained friends, we ask that you not proselytize during visits. It is perfectly fine to discuss your faith if your friend broaches the topic, but we never want to create a situation in which a person in detention feels conscious or unconscious pressure to conform to a visitor's religious convictions.
- Recognize the heightened importance of stability and consistency in your relationship with detained friends. Work consciously to build trust. Most people in detention do not even know when they will be released, or whether they will be permitted to remain in the U.S. with their families and communities, and this uncertainty creates anxiety and fear. You provide a measure of relief from fear by being a steadfast, reliable presence in your friends' lives.

### **Confidentiality**

Respecting the confidentiality of the detained immigrant's personal circumstances and legal case must be a high priority. Detained immigrants are in sensitive legal proceedings. Many (especially asylum seekers) may fear for their own lives and the lives of family members with them or in another country if word gets out that they are in a U.S. detention center. Some individuals in detention even refuse to speak about their immigration cases with other detained immigrants. Maintaining confidentiality is a sign of respect for the individual in detention. Strict confidentiality protects both the detained immigrant and the visitor.

With this in mind, visitors should follow these guidelines:

- Do not discuss or communicate information regarding an individual in detention's case with detention facility employees, other detained immigrants or deportation officers at the facility, or when you leave the detention center.
- If you want to tell other people about the experience of visiting, ask the detained immigrant's permission before sharing any part of his/her story. Use a pseudonym and a regional identification only (e.g., say "Africa" instead of "Guinea").
- Visitors need to find ways to work out their emotions following a stressful visit (during which you might hear disturbing details of your friend's personal story, for example) without violating their confidentiality. The right way to do this is to speak in general terms that don't betray your friend's confidences – e.g., "A detained immigrant told me disturbing details about what he went through and I'm feeling very upset" instead of "A detained immigrant was raped repeatedly..."
- Do not contact the detained immigrant's embassy or consulate. Asylum seekers and some other individuals are fleeing countries in which governments persecuted them or would or could not protect them. Contacting national officials may put some of our friends in acute danger. Detained individuals have the right to contact their embassies or consulates directly from detention if it is safe for them to do so and if they so desire.
- Similarly, do not contact local expatriates from the detained immigrant's home country without checking with the detained person first. There are often political and ethnic considerations and conflicts which may make such situations touchy.

### **Security Rules and Regulations**

Security rules and regulations change depending on the facility. In general, visitors can expect the following security procedures when entering a detention center:

- Background check prior to the first visit
- Requirement to present government-issued photo identification
- Requirement to provide information for the facility's visitor's log:
  1. Name & Identifying number of detainee
  2. Visitor name & address
  3. Relationship to detainee (friend)
- Security screening: walk through a metal detector and undergo personal search
- Remember that there is constant surveillance – the facility sees and hears everything that you do!

Common rules for detention centers include:

- Do not give any money or other items to a detainee.
- Do not bring any contraband into the facility. This includes pens, weapons, glass, cell phones, cameras, tobacco products, and alcohol.
- Do not say anything that can be misconstrued as inciting detainees to break the rules or commit acts of violence.
- Obey all instructions given by facility staff.
- Expect specific schedules for visiting times and time limits on individual visits.

### **Volunteer Roles Other Than Visitor**

- Educate others by hosting a meeting about immigration detention.
- View a documentary or video about immigration detention.
- Invite a former detained immigrant or another immigrant or refugee to come speak about their experience to your congregation.
- Host a "welcoming fellowship" event that invites immigrant and/or refugee congregations to a shared event with your congregation and creates opportunities for interaction, shared stories, and budding friendships.
- Be a Pen Pal to someone in immigration detention.

- Volunteer to answer a hotline that people in detention can call for assistance or companionship. Freedom for Immigrants and the Capitol Area Immigrants' Rights (CAIR) Coalition both manage such hotlines.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper in support of refugees and immigrants and the contributions they make to our country and your community.
- Speak out against xenophobia and the scapegoating of foreigners when you hear it.

### **Recommendations For Being A Stellar Visitor**

#### **Volunteer**

- As in any relationship, sometimes it takes a visit or two to “break the ice.” Give it time!
- Keep in mind that the individual in detention may want to just talk about the present and not the past. Don't pry into the details of their background or case. The detained immigrant may tell you their story when they are ready. Alternatively, they may never feel comfortable telling anyone besides their lawyer and the immigration judge.
- Visitor volunteers must be sensitive to the possibility that individuals in detention have experienced past trauma and that talking about past trauma may “re-traumatize” an individual.
- Convey what you understand. (“You say you are not receiving any letters.”) Be aware of non-verbal communication. Listen (and reflect back) not just the content but also the feelings of the conversation. (“You feel scared.”) Use non-verbal communication yourself. Your smile, your hand gestures, touching hands (even through glass) can be powerfully encouraging.
- Be aware of your role and boundaries. You are a friend and moral supporter, but requests to render financial or other assistance may go beyond the bounds of what you are able to do or can do consistent with our principles. We recommend that you not promise to do anything for your friends in detention besides visiting and writing. If someone in detention asks you to do something for him or her, such as communicate with a family member or attorney, you can refer the request to DC DVN leaders. (In some cases, we may be able to assist, but we will do so in such a way that confidentiality and privacy are carefully protected.)
- We recommend that you not give out your home address or phone number. You can share DC DVN's contact information and receive mail and other communications through us. If you choose to give out your phone number, be aware that you may get phone calls at unexpected times!
- Abide by the detention center's rules and be courteous to detention center staff at all times. The process of visiting carries with it certain stresses. For example, you may be searched, or have to wait a long time to see the person you came to visit, or become irritated by the attitude or behavior of a detention center staff member, or be surprised to learn that the detained immigrant you visit is no longer there. “Losing your cool” will serve no purpose other than, perhaps, to block you and others from visiting. Detention center staff have policies and procedures they must adhere to, and their work is not always easy.
- When concluding a visit, indicate if and when you will be back and then keep that commitment. Your visits can be a source of constancy in a turbulent time. If you will be unable to visit again in the short term, ask your friends if they would like another visitor while you are gone, and consider sending them a note or a letter while you are gone.

### **Conversation Starters – Ideas from DC Detention Visitation Network Volunteers**

#### *Introducing Yourself:*

- Sometimes an individual is puzzled to see a stranger visiting, and I have found it eases things to explain my motivation. For example: “Do you think it is kind of weird for a stranger to visit you? I am here because I lived abroad and the people there were very kind and welcomed me immediately into their community. There were even people who did not like the United States very much, but accepted me as an individual and treated me very well. I am here because I will never forget that generosity and I want to make sure you feel accepted and appreciated.”
- We usually start off by telling people who are new to us what DCDVN is all about emphasizing that we are there as friends.

- I would begin with my introduction and explain why I was there, then ask if the person wants to tell me a little about him- or herself, and what part of the country he or she is from.
- I always start with a new person by introducing myself and explaining that I'm part of the visitation network and that we're offering friendship and company during their confinement.

#### *Getting a Conversation Started:*

- I'm looking for any one topic that will make their eyes light up. I always start by asking people to tell me a little about their family, and I'll spin this out as long as they want to because it seems like it's almost always uppermost in their minds, especially kids.
  - I like to ask about whether they have children and if they do what the kids are like--and what they are good at. Sharing kid stories is a really great bonding thing.
  - Do you have family here? Do you have family in the country you left? (Sometimes family questions can lead to some sadness but generally people like being asked about their families as they are usually important to them.)
  - Are you in contact with your parents? Do they know where you are and do you get to speak with them?
- Tell me a bit about yourself. Do you have family; hobbies? Do you have family members in the U.S. and are you in touch with them?
  - I ask what do you like to do when you are not working--do you have hobbies or sports you like to play? What do you like to do for fun?
  - Ask what kind of work they did: "what do you do for a living when you are not in detention?"
  - Tell me about your town, the place you are from.
  - Where did you live in the US?
- I found sports discussions were a good ice-breaker.
- Food is a nice safe entry point that shows you care and lets them talk about their typical food and home country only if they want to go there.
  - Do you like cooking? What do you like to cook?
  - How is the food?
  - What is the best food you had this past week? (Or what is the best food you've had here so far?)
  - What is the worst food you had this past week? (Or what is the worst food you've had here so far?)
  - Only if they mention food from their home country: what food have you missed the most? Probe further about it and you can share whether you have tried it. You can ask if they found any good places in the area to get authentic food – this puts them in a position of power to help you with advice.
- For topics of conversation, I try to keep it light, asking about their favorite music, food, hobbies, etc. If someone wants to talk about something like the circumstances that brought them there or what life is like in the center that's what we talk about but I don't want to dive right in if they'd rather focus on something else.

#### *Talking About Detention and Immigration Enforcement:*

- Sometimes people want to talk about how they are doing and conditions but other times they are happy to speak about other things.
- I'd rather the person I'm visiting brought up conditions in jail than me ... but I will ask "are you getting enough to eat?" or "are you getting any exercise?" if they don't volunteer something about jail life.
- I never ask why they're in detention. Of course it often comes up, and I usually know by the end of the conversation. From my point of view, it seems almost irrelevant given how screwy and hit or miss the whole detention system is. If I get a really unusual comment ("I did 12 years in federal prison in Spokane, Washington, and ICE was waiting for me when I was released") I'll ask first about Spokane rather than why they spent 12 years in prison.



- How long have you been in this facility? How did you come here? What happened? (I don't typically probe further about how long they have been in country, but usually they will offer and then it's a good insight. Sometimes even if you just say "wow!!!" or just give them space they will share further, and it seems to be cathartic for them to verbalize some anxiety.)
- Are you being treated well? How are the officers? (Interestingly, they have ALWAYS answered positively to this question and so it has opened a conversation about humanity and how we are all the same, which makes the visit even more comfortable. But I guess there is a risk if the person is having problems with the officers since we can't do much.)
  - Do you have recreation here and what kind of recreation?
  - Do you have books in your language that you can read?
  - Do you receive pastoral care visits if you request them? For Muslims: do you have a place and time when you can pray? Are you visited by an Imam?
  - Are you able to sleep okay here?
- Do you prefer to spend your time alone or do you have some friends in your unit? (This lets them talk about usually preferring to spend time alone because they are afraid to trust others and don't want to get mixed in trouble, but also lets them express that they appreciate the visit from a stranger since it is a safer outlet to express feelings.)
- Do you have a court date? (I have found that since this is the most tangible next step in their lives they are quite eager to talk about how soon or far away it is. If rapport is established, you can follow up by asking if they are feeling okay about it. If they don't want to talk, they will say, "yes I'm okay". If they do want to talk, they will share their confidence or hope or fear, and usually will finish by sharing their sense of peace that the result is in God's hands.)
- I always ask whether they have a lawyer, usually late on in the conversation. I ask when the last time was they talked to their lawyer. I ask when their next hearing is coming up.

#### *Talking About Travel and Intercultural Exchange:*

- What surprised you about the United States? Was it different than you expected?
- Remember how many different kinds of people and different opinions and beliefs there are in your home country? It is the same here and I hope you know there are many people in the United States who care about you and are grateful for your hard work. I'm sorry if you experienced discrimination.
- I often ask if they've traveled much. You get the most unexpected answers sometimes. It helps that I can talk about Europe and people are often curious about England. I sometimes ask where people would go if they could go anywhere in the world (favorite answer so far: Norway).
- We have had interesting conversations with people about what it was like in their home country or things that they have done here in the US.

#### *Handling Distress and Sharing Prayers:*

- If the person seems unhappy or distressed, one can simply say: "Tell me what's going on." Just listening without too much opinion is also helpful.
- If you ask if the person is open to it and they say it's ok, then it helps me to pray either silently or together with them.

#### *In Closing*

Finally, I guess I just try to squeeze in somewhere: "somos hermanos", which just shows that the intention of the visit is not necessarily religious or political or self-serving, but just to express love.

#### **Issues to refer to DC DVN**

There may be instances or occasions when you feel that you are not able to adequately address the questions, concerns, or needs of the detainee that you are visiting. Please do not hesitate to approach a

DCDVN member for guidance if you begin to feel uncomfortable in any way. Here is a short list of situations in which you may want to inform DCVN that you have a concern:

1. Legal matters: upcoming court dates, need for a lawyer, parole affidavits, filing appeals, etc.
2. Mental and physical health concerns: depression, suicidal symptoms, prolonged illness, sudden weight loss, etc.
3. Urgent detained immigrant needs: contact with family, immediate or impending release.
4. Allegations of mistreatment or abuse of a detained immigrant inside the facility (note that Prison Rape Elimination Act regulations may require us to agree to alert jail staff or another advocate to any possible or alleged sexual abuse occurring in a detention facility).
5. Unprofessional conduct of detention center staff towards the volunteer.
6. Requests for assistance (e.g. money for a detained immigrant's account, contacting others on a detainee's behalf, or other material support).
7. Other questions or concerns the volunteer is uncertain how to deal with.

### **Self-Care for Volunteers**

Volunteers interact with people who, in many cases, have experienced serious trauma even before they enter into the custody of immigration enforcement authorities. Detention itself is a traumatic experience, particularly for people who do not know how long it will last or whether it will end with deportation or return to their home communities in the United States. This kind of trauma can and does affect people who support its sufferers. Volunteers should be aware that they may find themselves experiencing signs of secondary trauma, and that they should take the necessary steps to recognize and respond to the feelings that visiting people in detention may provoke.

Secondary trauma is a cumulative reaction to working with trauma survivors or hearing about particular traumatic experiences, with signs and symptoms that resemble those of the trauma survivor.

Symptoms can include:

- Feeling overwhelmed;
- Paralysis and insecurity around one's professional competence to support a trauma survivor;
- Feelings of sorrow, guilt, and emotional pain;
- Anger at the perpetrators;
- Viewing oneself as rescuer, and feeling a strong urge to "solve" the problem;
- Over-identification with the survivor;
- Difficulty with attention, concentration, and tuning out;
- Forgetfulness;
- Avoidance of the project, issue, or cause;
- Vivid recall – thoughts or dreams of the survivor's story, or psychological or physical distress when hearing or thinking about the survivor;
- Restlessness, irritability, trouble sleeping, or hypervigilance.

Tactics recommended by the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies to lessen the effects of secondary trauma include:

- Employ relaxation techniques like meditation;
- Practice mindfulness;
- Cultivate your sense of humor;
- Balance work, play, and rest;
- Eat a healthy diet and get some exercise;
- Return to comforting rituals or routines;
- Disconnect at the end of the day;
- Save time to discuss and process experiences with colleagues; and
- Engage in relationships and activities that restore hope and serve as reminders of the benevolent side of humanity.

## **V. Suggested Resources**

There is a growing array of information, books, materials, and documentaries that discuss immigration detention in the United States (and beyond). We encourage you to check out the following resources, and share your suggestions with us and our network of volunteers:

### **Organizations That Provide More Information About Immigration Enforcement and Detention**

International Detention Coalition: <http://idcoalition.org/>  
Detention Watch Network: <http://detentionwatchnetwork.org/>  
American Immigration Council: <http://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/>  
Define American: <http://www.defineamerican.com/>  
Immigration Impact: <http://immigrationimpact.com/>  
No More Deaths: <http://www.nomoredeaths.org/>  
National Immigration Forum: <http://www.immigrationforum.org/>  
CAIR Coalition: <http://www.caircoalition.org/>  
Freedom for Immigrants: <http://www.endisolation.org/>

### **Multimedia Stories Told By Immigration Detainees**

Life Inside Immigration Detention in Massachusetts: [www.communitybondsfilms.com](http://www.communitybondsfilms.com)

Detention Stories – Life Inside California’s New Angel Island: <http://www.endisolation.org/detention-stories/>

Words Beyond Walls: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/news/words-beyond-walls/>

IMMPrint: <https://imm-print.com/>