



“Bureaucratic cruelty”

This term was referred to by Dr Jon Juredini in his evidence to the AHRC Public Hearing. ChilOut believes it to be an apt description of the daily, operational aspects of people’s lives in detention. Outlined in brief below are some examples of this. Visitors, staff and asylum seekers experiencing the system are likely to have many more such examples. It is these seemingly small ‘annoyances’ that; when all added together and experienced every single day, become unbearable for many. Asylum seekers in detention are unable to exercise control, decision making or have any agency over these bureaucratic decisions imposed upon them. The effects can be damaged mental health, withdrawal from relationships and activities, anger, self-harm, reliance on medication, behavioural issues for children and family breakdown.

- Lining up daily for contraceptive pill rather than being given one month (or more) supply.
- No eggs can be taken in by visitors despite them clearly fitting in the fresh / non-imported food category which is permitted.
- No yoghurt can be taken in by visitors and microwaves were removed in many cases preventing people from making their own. This is a much desired and enjoyed staple food for many people in detention. Microwave removal then impacts on parents needing to heat bottles for infants (having to again rely on guards for such basic, daily necessities).
- Interpretation of what is and is not permitted in terms of correspondence sent to detained asylum seekers. Images A,B and C below are examples of what was ‘considered ‘emotive’ or likely to cause distress to children, and were withheld by approval of DIBP’. These bookmarks were created as part of a Victorian school based activity. ChilOut arranged for donated books to be sent to CI, each with a bookmark inserted, we were advised that these three were considered “inflammatory” and should not be provided to the children / families. Others featuring hearts and rainbows were permitted.
- Lego banned at one centre - long-term visitor, aware of protocols attempted to give it as a personal gift to child she had been visiting. At exactly the same time ChilOut was negotiating with Serco head office for Lego to be donated to every centre – approval has been granted for this to happen.
- No mobile phones, even those with no camera capability in “APODs” and IRHs. We know that most people in IDCs have phones, it seems incredibly cruel that a mother separated from her children and husband cannot have one. This is also the case for the other long-term detained (ASIO adverse) families.
- Inconsistencies around excursions from one centre to another, how many people are permitted at a time, how often, ratio of guards to asylum seekers etc.
- Lack of flexibility in excursions. For example a parent detained whilst their child is

- in the community. It is far safer and more positive for the family that the parent be brought out to see their child in a park, agreed residence etc than expecting the child to enter the detention environment and see their parent locked up all the time.
- IHMS forms. Inconsistencies from one centre to another and even one month to another around seeing a medical professional, getting a Panadol etc. Teenage boys detained at Leonora told of having to fill out a form requesting a Panadol, if it was put in the box after hours (which on some days could be after 5pm), they would have to wait 48hrs to receive the Panadol.
 - Having to book a phone call to people detained at Wickham Pt, Serco advised us that 'the centre is too large to just call people as can be done in other facilities'. To arrange this Serco have asked for 24+hrs notice, we send them a form, they have the person accept, sign the form at their end and then call can take place, result has been people moved to CI before we've been able to speak to them.
 - ChilOut is told that ABC TV for example is blocked at relevant news times, ie when PM, Immi Minister etc are scheduled to make announcements.
 - Slow internet and only half hour booking sessions. Most of time spent loading, logging on.
 - Forms to visit required to be faxed or delivered in person 24hrs ahead of visit - emailing option not advertised, only available to us after many requests.
 - Security requirements for Villawood Vollies for example. Volunteers who have already been security cleared, police checked and inducted are being required to come for on-site 'new training' if they are to take part in programs.
 - The tone, mood, requirements (showing or not showing IDs, ticking off names etc), items allowed in or not allowed in and basic operations for each centre can literally change dependent on which manager is on duty.
 - Ticking names off for meals with ID numbers, we observed this at a very small centre with a relatively low number of people detained who had all been there for many months at minimum – all people should have been known to all staff by name
 - Bikes and scooters for children were not allowed in one centre as they present "risk to children". At another detention facility we were shown bikes and scooters (still with price tags on them!) and a 'slip and slide' set up.
 - Having to fill out a form for a maternity bra, often request is not even met.
 - A pregnant woman asked Serco for another loose fitting skirt as she progressed in her pregnancy, she was told that 'you already have two and do not need another'
 - Bag checks for students returning from school at some centres but not at others
 - School lunches packed in disposable containers, just another difference to the other students with their personalized lunch boxes. Lunches are packed by caterers not by parents. Children and teachers tell us they are awful and usually not eaten (tuna salads etc). One school offered to cook rice for students but was told by Serco ' the children cannot have food that needs heating up as this is a health risk and the school does not have the correctly hygienic facilities for cooking rice' - other students at the school heat up their lunches etc.
 - Toy "library" has no borrowing opportunities so cannot be taken back to rooms
 - Eating from plastic plates etc with plastic cutlery day after day
 - Size of visiting rooms means that conversations are not private, space is so small that safety is questionable
 - No change mats available to parents inside centre, but one is in the visiting room

- No baby baths on CI, parents holding babies as young as 5weeks old under showers said to be dirty, yet stacked up outside Blaydin Pt are pallets and pallets of baby baths, many out of their packaging open to the elements
- Unable to take food from the mess hall. Some centres have outdoor, self serve areas with snacks and ability to make tea / milo etc
- Room checks at times completely inconsistent with the posters everywhere about healthy sleep patterns for children. Women in particular concerned about the room checks being performed by male guards – headdress, privacy and dignity issues.

Abortions

Since the time of ChilOut's submission to AHRC 2014 Inquiry, there have been more requests for termination of pregnancies by women detained on Nauru. We understand there have been at least four requests and that two terminations (at least) have been carried out – all four families were transferred from Nauru to the Australian mainland.

In all cases, the motivating factor for exploring the termination option has been that the family cannot perceive how they can raise a baby on Nauru, whether in the RPC or in the Nauruan community where they know education, healthcare and employment are all scarce at best. Women (not just these four) are fearful of their health whilst pregnant detained on Nauru, they are terrified of giving birth on Nauru and extremely worried about the health impacts the environment may have on a newborn child. In all four cases, the women have expressed that if it were not for their immigration detention on Nauru, they would very much want to have these babies.

It is ChilOut's position, and it has been stated by Professor of Obstetrics, Caroline deCosta, that once pregnancy is detected for any woman detained on Nauru, she and her family unit should be transferred to the Australian mainland (ideally into the community) for duration of ante and post natal period. Pregnancy should be a factor that precludes a woman and her family from being transferred from Christmas Island to Nauru.

Nauru

Information provided by asylum seekers transferred from Nauru RPC to mainland detention facilities (information below is first hand testimony)

1. General conditions: Death is better than life on Nauru, and that mental illness is everywhere. Medical help is almost non-existent – you get a medical appointment at 10am, but the bus comes for you at 11am, then you get given Panadol.
2. Water: People described water restrictions that meant 2 minute cold showers, and toilets often without water. Until recently the toilets would be without water for 2 days at a time, but since they were recently 'fixed', the toilets have water for one day then the next day no water – alternating consistently like this. The distribution of tents to toilets means that about 70 people use 5 toilets, and more people are coming to Nauru so, increasingly, more people using the same facilities.
3. Electricity: There are often electricity shortages and black outs. When there is a black out, generators are used as back up, but these don't provide much power. So they often can't use fans and it is too hot in the tents in the daytime with temperatures over 42 degrees. People are often fainting from the heat. The only respite is one small shady spot near the sports field where there are a few trees – hundreds of people sit there because it is the coolest place.
4. Separation: Three married men claim to have been separated from their wives and detained in the single men's camp on Nauru. It is stated to us that no reason was given for the separation and that there was no incidence of domestic violence or other such issues. The separations lasted 3 weeks in which time two of the men expressed suicidal ideation, one cut his wrists.

Information additional to ChilOut Submission to Australian Human Rights Commission Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention. July 2014.



Australian school children

IMAGES A, B, C. Bookmarks created by