

Bonne, ChilOut Ambassador, 2004

Bonne, 15, goes to school in Port Augusta, SA, with Baxter detainee children.

What Bonne thinks about asylum seekers and detention

I never really bothered with the issue of asylum seekers; I never thought twice about detention centres. There were just these people who had sewn up their lips, some had slashed themselves and jumped into barbed wire. What for? I was so completely unaware of the effects of detention centres and the way Australia is sometimes so brutal to refugees.

I was and still am quite curious about others' cultures and languages. One of the best things for me was meeting the students from Baxter detention centre when they started school. It was great getting to know them and gain wonderful friendships.

One of the worst things, when you know you *have* to do something, is to see a friend on TV. When my friends are at school, they are happy and act like any other person, they are no different. But to see them in a situation, which is only by chance for a split second, behind the wire, so confused, angry and distressed — it is not at all like it's them, but it is — that's when reality hits. That's someone I know, that's a friend. That's someone I care about.

It's sad, children, teenagers — anyone really — does not need to spend more than three years waiting. Do you feel that is right?

Politicians sometimes go overboard on asylum seeker issues, the *Tampa* affair for instance, for some reason. Why? To get public attention? Meanwhile children and their families are left to slowly sink into depression behind razor wire and electric fences. This is not at all the appropriate method, a punishment. For what crime? To seek asylum in our country?

The way you feel about asylum seeker issues is up to yourself, and that goes for the public as well. Whether or not they are in support of the mandatory detention policy is up to them, but if they are in favour of it, that's something I can't understand. Meeting children and teenagers from Baxter, becoming friends with them, was one of the best things EVER to happen to me. They are not monsters or disease ridden. I find them incredibly smart. Speaking at least two languages applies to all the children and teenagers I know. I am so grateful for all the language they have taught me, without them how would I know anything? I could not learn this at school or around my town. They are not crazy or terrorists, they are just in a bad situation, in detention. These children, teenagers and their families are really lovely people. They are friendly and, just like anyone else, love to have fun. They *are* people!

Report on ChilOut Ambassadors' trip to Canberra

11 March 2004

When I got to Canberra, it was very big and clean. There were all the embassies for other countries and I kept thinking we were in Sydney, even though I'd never been to Sydney before.

Each time I spoke, I emphasised different things and got more confident speaking out loud.

Minister Vanstone, believe it or not, is a human! But unfortunately, I don't think she understands the full extent of the trauma detention centres cause. This is something I wrote after I met her:

"She sat there, emotionless to our pleading and tears, we wept at the wounds of those who suffer from the effects of Australia's immigration policy.

She may be unemotional, but she was ready...ready to attack those who stood in the way and questioned how she could ever justify detention."

I did apologise to her after, but Minister Vanstone thought I was there for a debate, but I could not understand and I still do not understand how you can tell an eight year old he's not important, after all he has suffered because of detention.

A surprise was I saw Phillip Ruddock, and for once, he seemed happy and smiled before disappearing — maybe it's because he's not the Immigration Minister anymore.

With all the other politicians, I felt they were more relaxed and open when it came to that issue (except for Larry Anthony, who didn't show up!). They listened to us, and felt for the children, teenagers and families that are in detention, on TPVs and to some of our stories. I think if they felt compassion, they will begin or continue to help refugees and asylum seekers.

I enjoyed meeting other teenagers, like me, that are passionate about helping others like my friends. I am happy to have met all of them and hope to continue my new friendships.

I feel a lot more supported now, about helping my friends in detention, thanks a lot ChilOut!

I know it will give me more confidence in who I am, being able to speak in front of others about what I feel is right or wrong.

I would like to continue establishing ways to help children and their families in detention, for the rest of the year and until every one of my friends are out. I would also like to continue supporting my friends and their families, including those on TPVs.

They day overall was so good. I was able to help my friends and at the same time, blow John Howard a kiss!

The wish for a ladybird...

19 December 2003

I was spending some time with a little friend of mine who's in detention (her age is seven). We were just sitting around and then all of a sudden I spotted a ladybird on her hand. I held her hand up so she could see it.

It was quite a beautiful sight, now I remember it, we both had our hands together and this little ladybird flew off.

Both of us smiling, my dear friend looked at me said, "When a ladybird flies from you, you can make a wish."

"Well, it was on both our hands so we can both make one," I said to her smiling.

"I wish for..." she said, and then another word she seemed dared not to speak.

I was smiling at her and said "Hey, aren't you going to tell me? Oh well."

She came and put her arms around me and whispered: "I wish for visa."

Okay, so who said if you tell someone your wish it won't come true?

Yes, but what kind of a country would do that to a seven year old girl?

I have a six year old sister...would she wish for that? No, a puppy, a kitten, a pool and maybe her ears pierced. Is this something a child should worry about?

I wonder...do you know what I wished?

There are currently 179 children in detention, most of them with family. Some have been in one (or two) Australian detention centres for around 2–4 years.

Allowing children and their families (the immediate family they came with) a chance to live in Australia is not a threat. It is not opening doors to people smugglers. The government's decision to bring in the TPV (temporary protection visa) in October 1999 made women and children targets.

The friends of mine in detention are so lovely. Without them being allowed to attend school, I would not know how to read or write Persian (Farsi/Iranian) and speak a little of it. They have taught me so much that I would not have known through school or at home. Does that not mean they can help Australia learn and grow?