

Krystal, ChilOut Ambassador, 2004

Sixteen year old Krystal from Wagga Wagga, NSW, is doing Year 11 at TAFE. She has experienced a lot in her young life, including the death and illness of close family members, but she has come through it all wanting to help people, especially children in detention. Krystal is a volunteer art teacher, and plans to become a school teacher. She is also an outspoken member of Greenpeace.

Krystal speaks about refugees and asylum seekers

Children should not be in detention centres because no-one leaves their home unwillingly. Freedom is not given, it is our right at birth, and if someone asked me to swap places with a detainee I would not think twice about it. I would rather be locked up than sit here knowing that a person who is just like me has no freedom. I am very angry about this as they are only children. I am very upset. Free the children let them live a happy life, one without fear and one with freedom. If it was an Australian child there would be an uproar, so why is so different for these people? They have eyes and they have voices let them be heard outside of a captive environment.

Some politicians want to help, but most do not — it really is up to the public.

We got the impression that Senator Vanstone didn't care what we thought and it didn't matter about our opinion because she had already made up her mind. We talked to the human rights committee and I think that sharing our opinion with them might help them in their argument.

I now plan to join some groups in Wagga Wagga and hopefully get my point across. People in detention centres need to know that we care and that we have not forgotten them.

Krystal speaks about the trip to Canberra, 11 March 2004

My mum went into hospital the day before with an allergic reaction so I thought I would not be able to go, but my lovely friend Kaye booked me on a bus and I was on my way.

The bus trip like all bus trips was boring. I was knitting to show my Nan how much I had done which was hardly any, and these little kids were looking at me and laughing and they called me a granny!!

When I got into Canberra my Granddad was late picking me up so I was wandering around the bus station like a homeless person, when he finally got there I tripped over my shoe and everyone laughed at me.

Anyway my e-mails stuffed up so I didn't get the e-mail saying that the time had changed for dinner so me and my grandparents were waiting for half hour outside Turkish Pide and every third person who walked past I would ask, "Are you with ChilOut?" and they were like "no", so when I saw a taxi pull up with three girls in it I went dahhhh!!

I walked up to the girls and said "Excuse me are you with ChilOut?" and Bonne said "no" so I went to walk away and they started laughing at me. Bonne is a natural comedian.

I met Bonne, Hannah, and Joan and soon after I met everyone else.

Dinner was really nice, it was the first time I have tried Turkish food so it was OK.

During dinner I heard Sayed's amazing story and I swear I was almost in tears and would have started crying if everyone wasn't looking at me.

I had a pretty good night and I am really amazed and grateful that I was able to meet so many brave and wonderful people, which I now am privileged to call my friends.

The next morning when I arrived at the Parliament House, I met with first Bonne and then Dianne [ChilOut Coordinator] and then everyone else soon arrived. While we all stood out in the freezing cold Senator Amanda Vanstone prepared breakfast and I think the security guards must have felt sorry for us because they decided that we needed some motivation to get our blood pumping — we moved off the foot path, then onto the grass, then down to the end of the stairs, finally someone came for us and we were allowed inside, but not before being filmed by a news crew who must have thought we were protesters, lectured by a security guard and then we walked through a metal detector.

When I first met Senator Vanstone, my first impression was she's nothing like what everyone says she is, but then when Nahid and Zahra were in tears, that's when I got angry. I proposed that I would swap places with someone in a detention centre so that they could have their freedom but she just shrugged it off, so instead I had a staring competition with her and her staffer, and I think I won, bitter-sweet.

Next we met with the Shadow Minister, Stephen Smith, and that was a whole lot of facts and not enough of "this is what I'm going to do about it".

Next we met Senator Kirk, the most wonderful person I had met so far. She actually listened to us and shared the same point of view, but unfortunately the meeting was cut short because I had to talk to ABC which was really scary!!!

Around 10:30 we met Senator Jacinta Collins — Shadow Minister for Children and Youth, by then I was tired and an emotional wreck from trying not to cry and I was really hungry, we all were.

I told the Minister about how my father died and how I felt when it happened and then I compared it to how my friends and many refugees must feel and if they are feeling this then hell, this is torture, no one should be put through that at any time in their life.

Then we had a meeting with an assistant of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, I think that Larry Anthony was still off jogging.

The best part of the day was meeting with the Human Rights Committee, which was really cool and all the people were really nice.

Then lunch (which Andrew Bartlett paid for) a very shy but nice guy!!! and not because he gave us food, but because he cared.

We also meet with Tanya Plibersek who was really nice. She was there when we were doing the press conference, moral support you could call her.

Then we had Question Time, which was OK, I guess — let's just say if I wasn't representing ChilOut I would have been arrested — in summary: sexist, intimidating and pathetic.

At the end of the day we were presented with our certificates, and we parted.

I would have to say from this experience I have gained more than just knowledge and sense of pride, I have met really amazing people and I know I have probably said this three million times but I am serious and Nahid, when you read this I am still serious, I will chain myself to the airport for you!!!

A word of advice to the other people who read this: stay true to what you believe and don't every let someone tell you that your opinion does not matter, become a crazed mental patient if you have to, but don't let anyone tell you that you don't have an opinion!!!