

'I will never forget Yarl's Wood'

A young girl (called **Girl M**, aged 15) speaks about her experience of Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre in 2007.

Girl M came to this country in 2001 with her mother and they sought asylum after the family was persecuted by Turkish police for being Kurdish. After six years of living in the UK, their asylum claim was refused, which resulted in them being taken to Yarl's Wood. They now have refugee status and Girl M is back at school.

At 7 o'clock in the morning in August 2007, at our home in Doncaster, I woke up to hear banging on the door. As soon as my mum opened the door, these men rushed in. They told us to be quick: they were shouting. We were taken to Yarl's Wood. It's a detention centre, but it is no different from a jail.

At school I was good at science, maths and history, and I wanted to become a doctor. I missed my teachers and just being at school and doing normal things with my friends. I was in Yarl's Wood for three months.

I saw how the other people had suffered from being there. How they've just got pain in their eyes. When people are outside they've got that glowy thing in their eyes.

In Yarl's Wood, my mum was sad and crying all the time. It was really

hard, seeing her like that. I did everything I could – I spoke to the befrienders who came to visit us and I spoke to journalists, too. I wrote letters for my mother to the European Court of Human Rights, telling about the persecution she suffered in Turkey and why we came to the UK and how we'd lived here for six years. I speak English and all my friends are here. This is my home.

We applied for bail five times. Every time they said no. Then on 15 November, five escorts arrived, one woman and four men, and the woman searched our bodies in front of the waiting men. They took us to Heathrow. During the journey, I was thinking: What are my friends doing? Will I see my school again? Why do I have to go into a country I don't know?

I felt angry with everyone. When we arrived at Heathrow, an officer said to me: 'You know if you refuse to go on the plane, we'll put handcuffs on you and tie your feet. Tell your mum what I said'. They took my mum out and she started crying more and tried not to go up the steps. The officer pushed her on to the floor, and hit her with the handcuffs. She was bruised and cut. He handcuffed her, and dragged her

off the tarmac and up the steps to the very back of the plane.

I started crying, as I was scared. Two escorts held me by the hands. I kept saying: 'Let me go'. But one pinched my hands to make me go. On the plane, the officer sat next to my mother. She kept crying – he kept telling her: 'Shut up, shut up'. They sat me between two escorts who kept twisting my hands very hard. I kept saying: 'I want to speak to the pilot'.

The plane moved a bit, but it stopped and we were sent back to Yarl's Wood, but then we were taken to Bedford Hospital.

It was my birthday when I was in hospital and the Children's Commissioner, Sir Al Aynsley-Green, came to see me. We were released after a few days at Bedford Hospital. First, we were sent to an induction centre, where I started a new school, and then to Newcastle, where I had to start all over again in another school. But then our case was heard again and we have refugee status. In my school report they said I was an excellent student. I am making a new start and one day I will show everyone what I am capable of. But I will never forget Yarl's Wood. ■