

Activity Sheet 1.1

Kent and Dover: background information

The situation so far

Kent is a large county in the south-east of England. The Dover District Council area covers approximately 121 square miles and includes three main towns – Dover, Deal and Sandwich – as well as dozens of villages. The latest census figures estimate the population of the area to be 107,300.

Because of its position as the ‘gateway to Europe’, Kent has received a relatively large number of asylum seekers in recent years. Since 1996 many Roma gypsies from the Czech Republic have arrived there. Far-right political groups have focused attention on this, and on several occasions have attempted to march through the area handing out anti-asylum-seeker leaflets. There have been some violent incidents between local youths and Roma youths. There have also been rumours of Roma people being paid higher benefit than local people. One local newspaper was very strongly against the asylum seekers and published such strongly worded articles that the police had to warn it about the laws against ‘incitement to racial hatred’. Rumours persist about the asylum seekers being more likely to be criminals and there seems to be a lack of understanding and trust between them and the local population.

Some schools have been very slow to accept responsibility for educating the children of asylum-seeking families. Many families have found it difficult to get access to health care and to professional advice and help. Slowly, however, matters have started to change for the better.

Some of the work undertaken so far by volunteers

