

Activity Sheet 1.2

Interview 1 (part 1)

Gill Casebourne is a member of Kent Refugee Action Network (KRAN)

‘There are lots of voluntary groups around Kent which have sprung up to help since 1996. We started up KRAN to try to help these groups keep contact with each other, share information and get funding for their work. We also deal with TV, radio and newspaper interviews and try to improve understanding through explaining the facts and encouraging peaceful social relationships. We have had some support from a national organisation called Refugee Action to help get organised.

Is KRAN doing this on their own? What evidence is there of local and national action to help them? What do they do?

‘Refugees have always had to come to this and other countries and when there are growing problems worldwide there will be more refugees. Other countries accept far more refugees than we do and many parts of the UK have been used to taking them, but it’s a new situation for Kent where most areas have had no history of ethnic-minority communities. Many parts of Kent, especially the coast areas, have also suffered severe economic problems; people are not well off and there is high unemployment. In this situation people have a natural fear that local needy people are getting less help because of the need to support the newcomers.

‘We believe these fears have been made much worse by publicity from Government, politicians and the Council suggesting that most asylum-seekers are not genuine and will be sent home and also prevented from coming here. The authorities also seem to have been waiting for Government to move asylum seekers out of the area and solve the problem for them instead of trying to break down the barriers between the

asylum seekers and the local people. This, along with actively racist local newspapers spreading prejudice and rumours, has meant that the mistrust and lack of knowledge has continued and built up.

Why does Gill believe the local community in Dover have not accepted asylum seekers after all this time?

Do you believe that newspapers can make such a difference in the way local people will react in a situation like this? Why?

What could KRAN and others do to help change the situation?

‘We have been asking the local council to coordinate with us the production and distribution of a booklet with the real facts about asylum seekers as a way to help break down the myths that exist. Most people, for instance, still believe that asylum seekers get more money than other people on benefits but in fact they receive less.

Do you think such a booklet would help to change the situation and the perceptions of local people?

Why do you think the authorities have not helped KRAN to get this booklet published?