

Activity Sheet 1.3

Interview 1 (part 2)

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

‘We have got on and done as much as we could ourselves. Two of our groups, Refugee Link and Dover Residents Against Racism, organised a multicultural festival in Dover. It was mostly attended by asylum seekers, and we were disappointed that few local residents turned up, but it did show the Roma people that there were people in Dover who were interested in them and their way of life. Since then several Roma bands have formed and have become known locally. There was also recently a fun theatre project at the YMCA which involved young people from both communities, and now numbers attending the YMCA have risen and the two groups socialise together instead of staying separate and suspicious.

Do you think this kind of activity will be more successful than the booklets? Why?

Why do you think very few local people went to the event?

Is this likely to change over time? Is it worth doing anyway?

‘Unfortunately there are still lots of people who are strongly against the asylum seekers being allowed to stay in Kent or the UK generally. We need to do a lot of work to try to organise events where local people can meet them and understand that lots of their ideas about them are wrong. Refugees usually turn out to be of great benefit to their host country.

‘Our voluntary groups offer a range of services from just befriending families and teaching English to ‘drop-in’ and advice centres, visiting and standing bail to free husbands and fathers from being held in prisons and detention centres, and supporting asylum seekers through the whole bewildering and frightening claim system. Sometimes it feels as though we are the only

people standing up in most of the media coverage to speak for refugees and asylum seekers. We have had lots of letters printed in the press but there’s always another problem around the corner. This week the county council has announced that the council tax is going up by a huge amount. They have blamed this on the costs of looking after the asylum seekers but actually only £3 accounts for this. It has been argued that this money may eventually be repaid by central government. This £3 was the cost of the needs of children arriving without family. You would think people would even be willing to give such a small sum for children sent here alone to get them out of danger, wouldn’t you?

‘It’s just becoming too easy for politicians to play the “asylum card” and blame them for everything. That way, they avoid people holding them responsible and instead build up even more hostility against asylum seekers – and that’s not going to help us break down barriers between people is it?’

What method does Gill mention for getting her views across to the public? Do you think this would be a good method? Why?

Do you think this is the only explanation for why the hostility continues?

Given the problems, what can organisations like KRAN realistically do to improve things?

Can you give them any suggestions for developing their plans?