

Organising an event - a brief case study



When Britain First announced on their social media (in September 2019) that they were organising beach patrols to keep watch for asylum seekers arriving in dinghies, local activists discussed it and initially decided to monitor the situation but not to give them any publicity if we could help it. We could see from the photos that we were talking about a few middle-aged men with some beach chairs and a pair of binoculars - a fairly pathetic sight - and those of us that know the coastline knew that Samphire Hoe, where they set up their photo shoot, was a place with a sea wall where no dinghy was ever going to be able to come ashore. The whole thing was laughable really.

But a couple of days later the Britain First pictures had made the front cover of the Metro newspaper - which has the biggest circulation of any paper in the UK - and I knew we had to respond.

We are lucky here in Folkestone that we have a sandy beach that's perfect for writing big messages that look great in photos. I checked the tide times to find when low tide was the following weekend (there's no point assembling people on a beach that's covered in water!) and set up a Facebook event page asking people to come down to support a 'Refugees Welcome' event.

We are also lucky that a professional photographer who lives locally, Andy Aitchison, has always been really supportive. I asked him if he would come and take photos and he said yes straight away.

On the day four people met early to make sure the message was ready for when people arrived. We brought garden rakes (which we have discovered are BRILLIANT for writing messages on a sandy beach) and made sure the message was going to be visible in the photographs by going up to a vantage point above the beach to check.

I gave a brief speech, and then Andy took photos. Some people had brought flares which definitely added to the drama of the pictures he captured.

We released a picture, along with the text of my speech and some quotes from local people explaining why they had wanted to support the event.

We got some really good coverage from the event which you can read below. As you can see the image was key to getting that coverage. Whatever you do, make sure that you get a really good strong image. Ours tells a story - that the local community in Kent welcomes refugees. The fact that the message is on a beach, where refugees might arrive in dinghies, adds poignancy to the picture. The image was also shared widely on social media reaching hundreds of thousands of people that way. And - we can't take credit for this sadly - but Britain First haven't been seen 'patrolling' since.

<https://www.thelondoneconomic.com/politics/refugees-welcome-event-held-on-beach-targeted-by-far-right-beach-patrols-161385/>

<https://www.kentlive.news/news/kent-news/dont-want-you-here-straightforward-3349405>

<https://www.kentonline.co.uk/folkestone/news/anti-racism-activists-take-to-beach-212839/>