

# *One year on...*

## **DOVER DISCOVERY CENTRE**

---

### **Report from Symeon Hall, Centre Manager**

---

The concept of the Dover Discovery Centre, which opened in September 2003, is one of bringing partners together to provide a holistic approach to service delivery through close partnership of those working for people living in the Dover District. The partners in the centre include Kent Adult Education Service, the Dover Library, UK Online and the Dover Museum. There is also a crèche and café at the centre.

The centre has been able to benefit the residents of Dover District in a number of ways:

UK Online, the first to move into the Discovery Centre in February 2003, has proved to be a huge success, with approximately 40 local volunteers who help to support the service of free IT and Internet use. The number of UK Online members accessing the service is over 1,600.

Adult Education moved in by April 2003 prior to the start of their new term so as not to cause too much disruption for tutors and students. The number of tutors has increased and, in addition, since moving into the new premises, one and a half new posts have been created as a result of the setting up of the Flexi Learning Suite. This is a new service that provides free access to basic skills. The number of classes run at the centre has increased to 253 with over 2,000 student enrolments. Courses on offer at the centre

range from computing to creative studies and run from Monday to Saturday.

Since moving into the centre in July 2003 and after public consultation the Dover Library has increased its opening times. The local studies library, for example, is now open full time with over 95% of the Library's Local Studies stock on public show. In excess of 6,000 new books have also been purchased. The Library has worked in partnership with Adult Education to improve the stock of books available to students. Libraries have been working with Sure Start to help increase literacy within some of the most deprived wards in Dover. They have also been working with Bookstart to introduce reading to young children. In addition to the everyday users of the library over 1,800 young people aged 0 to 16 have taken part in events organised by the library since August 2003. Library membership has increased to 8,043, which includes 2,256 new members joining as a result of the move from Maison Dieu House. Library issues have increased by 21% in 2003-04.

To date the Dover Museum has had over 121 school groups and 3,311 pupils on educational visits studying Roman, Tudor and WW2 periods. 44 have come from schools within the Dover District with 1,209 pupils and 77 from outside the District with 2,102 pupils.

The centre has seen the setting up of 2



View of the main library



The children's library



The teenage 'curve'

new businesses. A crèche employing 6 Dover residents and a café which employs 3 Dover residents both opened in August 2003. The centre has also supported those affected by the recent P&O redundancies by providing facilities for Jobcentre Plus to set up an 'Employment and Information Centre' free of charge. The centre is also being used by the Skillnet Group which provides new skills for adults with learning disabilities. This supports 20 local residents.

Plans for the development of the theatre are still under discussion. All views from the public using the centre are appreciated and issues raised in the 'Comments book' are considered and acted upon.

To illustrate the first year success of the Discovery Centre the following quotes have been taken from the book:

*'I am absolutely amazed. Dover really needed a place like this. Fantastic'*

*'Fantastic. Dover really needed this. Everything under one roof and children's area is especially lovely. My two daughters enjoyed the day.'*

*'Wow! We're not used to something like this in Dover. Superb. Will be back. Fantastic facility'*

*'What a brilliant use of this building for the people of Dover'*