



*Repton Jogging Club*

# Faster, Higher, Stronger!

As we start the count down to the Olympics, Lissa Cook takes a look at how Derbyshire's villages are gearing up for the sporting challenge

**T**he Olympic 2012 countdown starts now. It's just a year to go until the opening ceremony kicks off a month long celebration of sporting excellence next July.

The counties of Berkshire, Essex, Hertfordshire and Dorset will play host to rowing, mountain biking, canoe slalom and sailing, whilst the cities of Manchester, Glasgow, Coventry, Newcastle and Cardiff will welcome the world's best footballers. Yet the nearest Derbyshire will get to Olympic action is to cheer on the torch bearer passing through Derby on 29th June. So should we feel a little left out? Not in the slightest.

That's the message from a not-for-profit company called the Community Sports Trust who want to inspire local

people of all ages and abilities in villages across the county to get active. A year ago they set up the 'Derbyshire Village Games', with support from bodies across the county, and funding from Sport England's Rural Fund, hoping the Olympic spirit 'Citius, Altius, Fortius' (Faster, Higher, Stronger) will rub off on all of us.

Last year they recruited a team of six Village Games officers plus a Coach and Volunteer Development Officer who works with young people in schools. Over the next six months we'll be profiling the work they're doing on the doorstep with communities in North East Derbyshire, Bolsover, Amber Valley, High Peak, Derbyshire Dales and South Derbyshire.

They come from all walks of life but are all highly qualified and passionate about sport. For example Emma

Beswick (High Peak) worked in hospitality before taking a degree in Sports Coaching and Development at the University of Derby, Buxton. Toni Jantschenko (South Derbyshire) left school at 16 and worked as an electrician for ten years before a chance invite to a ladies' activity morning trampolining in Long Eaton literally turned her life upside down. After seven years of part-time studying fitted in around her day job she gained a degree in Business Sport and Leisure.

For Project Manager Hayley Lever, who has worked in sports development in Derbyshire for over 10 years, the motivation behind the project was simple: 'I felt that there was a lot more that could be done to get people active, right on their doorstep – people of all ages – adults and older people as well as parents and children wanting to do



*On the rope course at Whitehall, near Buxton*



*Tai Chi at Barrow-on Trent*



*The indoor climbing wall experience*



*Trying out the high wire at Whitehall's family activity day*



*Enjoying the family activity day*

activities together as families. If you live in a city or town there are leisure centres with timetabled classes but a lot of Derbyshire is really rural, and not everyone is willing, able or motivated to travel.

'Our idea is that if you go out and listen to what people want you can then give them a helping hand by recruiting volunteers, finding an instructor or coach and a venue and publicising a class or an event and set up activities right on the doorstep. There are often village halls, community centres or playing fields available and there's an amazing network of qualified coaches and teachers in Derbyshire.

'I'd seen what a massive difference the Community Association made in my own village of Chinley. A group of volunteers got together with the parish council to ask people in the village what they wanted. Five years on we have a thriving free cinema, we've refurbished the community centre which is booked out for everything

from parties to Brownies and amateur dramatics; we've drained the football pitches, resurfaced the netball court; and we even have our very own fell race. There are over a dozen activities and clubs to choose from in the village, with three netball teams, girls football, family sports, a cycling club and much more. Friends visit from big cities like London and Birmingham and joke that we have more going on here than they have at home!'

Hayley and her fellow board member and sports development consultant, Andrea Kemp, were convinced the model could work in other villages. And it seems they've been proved right.

In Andrea's home village of Crich volunteers from the Tors Community Sports Club in partnership with Village Games Officer Heather Palfreyman organise everything from abseiling to Zumba dance classes.

Forty ladies attended Emma's first 'Back to Netball' session in New Mills – over 50 turned up the next week. In Chinley adults with learning difficulties

*Emma Beswick and Hayley Lever*



at the Alderbrook Day Care Centre have had a go at everything from trampolining, to golfing, bowling and sailing and are planning cheerleading classes next. In Repton the jogging club's so popular that 19 of Toni's novice runners ran the South Derbyshire 5k and three even completed the London marathon.

So while Derbyshire might not be hosting an Olympic event, we can be proud that we're perhaps inspiring a new generation of athletes to go faster, higher and stronger. For the rest of us, maybe we should coin a new 'Village Olympics' motto – 'Fitter, Healthier and Happier'. □