

## Derbyshire's Village Games

# The High Peak

With less than a year to go to the 2012 Olympics, Lissa Cook talks to the 'Derbyshire Village Games' team who are working across the county to inspire local people of all ages and abilities to get active. This month the High Peak comes under the spotlight...

**W**hen my husband and I moved to Derbyshire five years ago after nearly a decade working down in London everyone asked how we'd cope without friends and family. It was a question that had never crossed our minds. To us, the answer was obvious. Wherever we've lived, sport's been the ideal way to meet out-going, like-minded, sociable people who usually aren't averse to an evening in the pub after a strenuous game of rugby or an exhausting run.

It's that combination of 'fun, friendship and fitness' that's the Derbyshire Village Games' motto. They want to build on the excitement around the Olympics and hope that by helping local people set up and run clubs, events and training sessions they'll create a real and sustainable legacy that goes way beyond building velodromes, race tracks and stadiums.

Emma Beswick spotted the advert for the High Peak Village Games Officer while studying Sports Coaching and Development at the University of Derby, Buxton. 'I knew it was my dream job. I grew up around here. When I was a child there was nothing like the Village Games – we'd have loved it. So as soon as I heard about the project I could envisage it working.'

When you meet Emma she fizzles with enthusiasm. Her experience



working as a front of house manager in hospitality means she's used to a job which puts people first and where no two days are the same.

'I was very sporty at school but shift work made that difficult to keep up. I started going to the gym when my daughter went to nursery and that inspired me to take up running. It made me feel better in myself – more balanced and healthier. And it helped me make friends and have fun.'

In an increasingly bureaucratic and technological world, Emma's a breath

of fresh air. Her approach is deceptively simple. 'I talk to people. I ask myself "How would you get me to do this?" I meet people in the pub and start chatting or I drop off leaflets in hairdressers, doctors' surgeries or indoor markets and shops.'

Her direct strategy's paying off. For example, more than 40 ladies attended her first 'Back to Netball' session in New Mills. More than 50 turned up the next week. She's also helped Dove Holes set up a Football Centre with around 20 people each week. Thanks to Emma and the Village Games, Peak Forest people now enjoy dance sessions, multi-sports sessions and chair-robics. Her 'Olympian' mixed sports sessions at Chapel leisure centre are proving a real hit with families – in particular with mums and sons.

Emma is supported in her work by two other members of the team who also live and work in the High Peak – project manager Hayley Lever and Chris Burns who as 'Rural Derbyshire and High Peak Coach and Volunteer Development Officer' definitely has the longest title at the Community Sports Trust!

He works with Derbyshire's School Sports Partnership running volunteering and coaching programmes. Chris is the talent-spotter. It's his job to pick out young people with leadership potential, helping them



get on the first rung of the ladder in sports coaching and development with after-school sessions and leadership academies. Having competed in decathlon as a junior, Hayley jokes that Chris is the only member of the team to have pole vaulted. He knows better than most what a huge impact sport can have. It's taken him all over the world – from summer camps in the States to townships in South Africa where met his partner Caroline. (Their first date was a sky-dive!)

He says: 'Sport can help you get a job or go travelling. You can earn a lot more coaching at a local club during the summer holidays than working in a restaurant. It's a brilliant way to make friends and looks great on your CV even if you don't end up with a career in sport.'

For Project Manager and founder

board member of the Community Sports Trust, Hayley Lever, the great thing about the Village Games is that by working in partnership with councils they can make funding from bodies like Sport England go much

And it's clear that in their first year alone that their go-getting approach is working. They've worked in more than 50 villages with an impressive tally of more than 36,000 attendances at events, activities and clubs including



further. Chris Nightingale from High Peak Borough Council agrees: 'The Derbyshire Village Games project has had a significant impact in the High Peak. It's acted as a catalyst to deliver new and innovative sports programmes ensuring that more people get the opportunity to participate, volunteer and coach sport.'

family adventure days at the Whitehall Centre, a Village Decathlon in Chinley, A Year To Go Olympics Day in Glossop. □

**Next month** we'll look at the work of the Village Games team at the other end of the county in South Derbyshire.

