

# Community Sports Trust brings Olympic spirit to Derbyshire's doorstep

The not-for-profit company is working in local communities to inspire people to take up sport

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Lissa Cook for the Guardian Professional Network  
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Village Games officers have set up classes in netball, trampolining, golfing, bowling and sailing, and have plenty more planned Photograph: Christopher Furlong/Getty Images

With a year to go to the 2012 Olympics, securing a place in Team GB is the overriding goal for the UK's sporting elite. Many won't have qualified yet and will be putting the finishing touches to their final year's training cycle.

For athletes at this highest level, the Olympics is a huge incentive to get out of bed and sacrifice the time to train day after day. But if sport's not your job then finding the motivation can be hard.

That's where a new not-for-profit company called the Community Sports Trust comes in. They think they've hit on a winning formula to inspire people of all ages and abilities to get active. A year ago they set up the Village Games in their home county with support from bodies across Derbyshire and funding from Sport England's Rural Fund.

Last year they recruited a team of six Village Games officers (VGOs) to work in local communities, as well as a coach and volunteer development officer to work with young people in schools.

For project manager Hayley Lever, who has worked in sports development for more than 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 activities

together as families."

Hayley had seen what a big difference the voluntary Community Association had made in her own village of Chinley, on the edge of the Peak District, halfway between Sheffield and Manchester.

She says: "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; 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, with three netball teams, girls' football, family sports, a cycling club and much more. Friends visit from big cities such as 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.

For example, in Andrea's home village of Crich, volunteers from the Tors Community Sports Club in partnership with Village Games officer Heather Palfreyman organise activities from abseiling to Zumba dance classes.

Forty ladies attended High Peak VGO Emma Beswick's first Back to Netball session in New Mills, and over fifty turned up the next week. In Chinley, adults with learning difficulties 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. And in South Derbyshire Village Games organiser Toni Jantscenko says the Repton jogging club is so popular that nineteen novice runners have now run their first 5k and three even completed the London marathon.

Key to their success has been working in partnership with local councils and county-wide organisations such as Derbyshire Sport and Active Derbyshire. This means they can benefit from, rather than duplicate, established networks and harness existing resources such as website and press contacts, while adding extra value.

As project manager, Hayley acts as the hub and coordinates the work of the six VGOs and the school sports coach and development officer, Chris Burns, setting and assessing targets. All the VGOs work closely with the local council in their area – most are based in district council offices. The county stretches from Glossop near Manchester to Derby in the south, with remote Peak District national park villages in between, so the board took a pragmatic three-year strategy. Year one's list was limited to around fifty villages. Now the VGOs are widening their net, and by 2013 they aim to cover 150 villages.

While Team GB pursue the Olympic dream "Citius, Altius, Fortius" (Faster, Higher, Stronger) the Village Games motto is more modest, but no less worthy: "Fitter, Healthier and Happier".

So what's their secret?

1. Hayley says the number one lesson is to start off by asking what people want. "You can't force people to get fit and healthy. You have to make it fun. Our VGOs go out into hair salons, libraries, pubs and local shops and take the time to chat to people and listen to them. We make sessions friendly and sociable."

2. The next priority is recruiting a team whose passion for sport is backed up by qualifications. Collectively, the five-member board of directors has decades of experience in sports development, while each member of staff on the ground has a relevant degree and professional experience.

3. Third, says Hayley, is people skills. "Our VGOs come from all walks of life." Emma worked in hospitality before taking a degree in Sports Coaching and Development. Toni left school at 16 and worked as an electrician for ten years before a chance invite to a ladies' activity morning inspired her to train as a trampolining coach. After seven years of part-time studying fitted around her day job she gained a degree in business, sport and leisure.

3. Make activities accessible and sustainable. "There's no point going out and doing everything for people. When the project ends in two years, we want these new clubs to carry on. If we're doing our job right, our staff should act as catalysts, giving local people a helping hand by recruiting volunteers, finding an instructor or coach and a venue and publicising a class or an event." Activities have to be delivered on the doorstep, Hayley says. "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."

5. The final tip comes from Finance Director Andy Shooter. After a lifetime's career in banking, he now runs a consultancy advising small to medium-sized businesses. Andy says: "Not-for-profit doesn't have to mean compromising on efficiency. Applying sound business principles to an ethically motivated company enhances its core values, making it more effective."

*Lissa Cook is a journalist and works in PR & communications at the [Community Sports Trust](#)*

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