

Derbyshire's Village Games

Amber Valley

With the summer Olympics just six months away, Lissa Cook focuses on Amber Valley, talking to Village Games Officer Heather Palfreyman about turning sporting dreams into reality

IN MID MAY the Olympic Torch will arrive at Land's End. Lit from the rays at the Temple of Hera, queen of the gods, in Olympia, birthplace of the Greek Games, the sacred flame will be carried by more than 100 torchbearers every day, each running a fifth of a mile. It's estimated that the 70 day, 8,000 mile long relay route will come within ten miles of 95 per cent of every home in the country.

On 29th June nine towns and villages across Derbyshire – Glapwell, Bolsover, Calow, Chesterfield, Matlock, Darley Dale, Bakewell, Buxton and Ashbourne will welcome the torch, culminating in an evening of festivities in the city of Derby.

In ancient times the heralds carrying the torch were sent out to declare a truce for the duration of the Games. To win the bidding war modern Olympic cities have to be increasingly ambitious. London won its bid on a promise to 'inspire a new generation of young people to take part in volunteering, cultural and physical activity'. And right here in Derbyshire, a not-for-profit company called the Community Sports Trust came up with an innovative way to turn that pledge into reality.

In the spirit of those original messengers, they created the 'Derbyshire Village Games' project. Six Village Games Officers were recruited and sent out to villages in each district of the county to listen to what local people wanted and needed to help them get active.



'To inspire a new generation of young people to take part in volunteering, cultural and physical activity'

As you'd expect, Amber Valley's coordinator, Heather Palfreyman, is passionate about sport, in particular swimming. In fact she could swim before she could walk and went on to compete at national and international level. Originally from Blackpool, she worked for the Borough Council as Sports Club and Volunteer Coordinator before moving here – about as far from the sea as it's possible to get!

Key to her success in getting activities up and running has been creating a spiders web of partners across the area's villages. Heather has involved primary

schools, the School Sports Partnership, sports clubs, leisure centres and coaches, brownies and scouts, day care centres, town and parish councils, as well as churches and charities and the Women's Institute and Lea Green Development Centre. This collaborative approach has meant she's been able to help local people set up a wide range of sessions in a variety of venues, right on people's doorsteps – like scout huts, church halls, playing fields, schools and sports clubs. Most importantly it means activities become ingrained in village life so will hopefully continue in years to come.

Working with Amber Valley Active's Return to Sport project, netball, squash, hockey, football, gymnastics, cricket and Zumba dance have all been introduced to rural villages. Heather says: 'The uptake of Zumba's been amazing, and we now have weekly sessions in four villages – Denby, Holbrook, Crich and South

Wingfield. Each of these sessions gets between 25 and 40 ladies who come to shake their booty!' Other activities that have proved popular are pilates, multi-sports and street dance for children, informal sports sessions on village greens, multi-sports for men and keep-fit classes.

But for Heather the real highlights have been the family fun days: 'We held our first one at Lea Green Development Centre in April which was a huge success. We had nearly a hundred people there from toddlers through to the over eighties! It included fun challenges like parkours (an urban-



inspired freestyle run/gymnastics), slack-lining (imagine tight-rope walking on a wobbly rope), and an Easter Egg hunt orienteering obstacle course. The adults were just as enthusiastic as the children, if not more so, and the feedback was fantastic.'

Her three-hour fun packed half-term and Easter holiday activity programmes in Denby, Crich, South Wingfield and Alfreton also proved a hit. One mum said her children loved the fact that it was something different from football and another said their children wished they'd have been able to go every day.

Heather's next big goal just ahead of the Olympics is to celebrate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in June. 'It would be a great opportunity to work with even more villages and help them develop fun ideas that can get the whole community involved like tug-of-war, welly-wanging and space hopper races.' Another date for the diary she's keen to remind people of is the Sport Relief Mile at Shipley Country Park on Sunday 25th March.

The Tors Community Sports Club in Crich is another great example of how the Village Games team can support

local volunteers. They aim cater for everyone from novice joggers to budding David Beckhams. Ann-Marie McMillan from the Toy Library says: 'Heather has literally hit the ground running since she came into post as Village Games Coordinator. The impact she has had on the community of Crich and the surrounding areas is simply staggering.' For Ann-Marie the true test of Heather's value is that many groups are continuing to flourish after the initial trial periods. Tors Community Sports Club Secretary, Linda Philo is also full of praise: 'She's a joy to work with – enthusiastic, professional, knowledgeable, positive and very helpful. I could go on...'

Chair of the club, Andrea Kemp lives in Crich. She's also one of the founder board members of the Community Sports Trust. 'The Village Games officers are the life and soul of the project. Having a friendly face out and about meeting and talking to people makes the world of difference. It gives people the

encouragement and confidence to take that first step to try a pilates class or netball for the first time since school. Their backgrounds in sports development means they can act as a go-between finding coaches and venues. And they can liaise with local councils and other organisations to make the most of everyone's increasingly stretched time and money. We really think Derbyshire's blazing a trail in helping rural communities get fit and healthy.' ■

- If you want support setting up activities where you live or to hold a Village Games event in the run up to the Queen's Jubilee or the Olympics, you can contact your local coordinator at www.villagegames.org.uk.
- You can register for the Shipley Country Park Sport Relief Mile at my.sportrelief.com