

Derbyshire's Village Games

South Derbyshire

T'ai Chi, jogging and back-to-netball in South Derbyshire ...Lissa Cook talks to Village Games Officer Toni Jantschenko ...

My mum still laughs about my Physical Education report from my school in Chesterfield. I was always a naturally academic child who sailed through exams but PE was a different matter. My PE teacher generously wrote: 'Lissa is enthusiastic about every activity she tries.' Reading between the lines that meant trailing in last in the sports day 800m and a lacklustre long-jump performance. I knew from an early age that Olympic glory would never be mine.

With gentle encouragement from friends at university I remember sweating and swearing through my first run, when I struggled to manage the length of a playing field. The feeling of crossing the finishing line of the London marathon was incredible – even being overtaken by a team of fun runners dressed as National Lottery balls couldn't take away the sense of achievement – though it did sting when the Bonus Ball overtook me on the final stretch!

So for me, sport's undoubtedly made me fitter and happier. But for South Derbyshire Village Games Officer Toni Jantschenko one sport in particular literally turned her life upside down. Having left school at 16

to take up an apprenticeship she worked as an electrician for ten years. Out of boredom one morning she accepted a friend's suggestion to go along to a ladies' trampolining session in her home village of Long Eaton. She has never looked back. Toni says: 'I was hooked from the very first moment I got on the trampoline and had taken my first exam within six months.'

For Toni, trampolining has done more than improve her social life and her fitness. She went on to work as a coach in schools and leisure centres in Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Leicestershire before starting a degree in Business Sport and Leisure at Nottingham Trent University. With three children and working at coaching for 30 hours a week it took seven years, but in 2009 she graduated with first class honours.

She's passionate about sports development and in particular inspiring young people. 'I wanted to get children up and active rather than sitting in front of the TV.' In fact, the club she helped set up in Nottingham over a decade ago is still going strong and is about to enter its first national-level competition. ▷



Toni Jantschenko



The Youth Group at Castle Donington

VILLAGE GAMES



T'ai chi at Barrow on Trent



Repton: jogging and table tennis (below)



Her approach to encouraging others to transform their lives through sport is to act as a catalyst: 'It has to come from the community. I talk to local people about what they want to do and then ask them to get involved and become a volunteer. I help support them in learning how to run the activities they want to do themselves. The Village Games is amazing – it's going to grow and grow.'

Since joining the Village Games team Toni's helped set up youth activities across South Derbyshire. In the wake of the recent riots young people have hit the headlines for all the wrong reasons. In South Derbyshire the Village Games have supported a band of local people in Willington who formed an Action Group to target anti-social behaviour. WAG Chair Andrew Macpherson says: 'After 15 years without a youth club it was decided the best way to engage the youngsters was not to reinvent the wheel but to look at club based activities. It's a real pleasure to see the number of kids that come along, it's also great to see the support we are getting from the rest of the village. It's

really brought people together.' Teenagers Ellie Harding and Grace Smith agree: 'It's great, it gives us time to see our friends and something to do instead of roaming around the streets.'

At the other end of the age spectrum, T'ai Chi has proved popular. Instructor Chris Lewis who runs classes in Barrow and Repton and Rosliston Forestry Centre describes the movements inspired by the ancient Chinese martial art as 'graceful, gentle and soft' but says the exercises are deceptive because they are actually very powerful and require control and relaxation. He discovered T'ai Chi when supporting a friend suffering from agoraphobia who'd heard that learning the benefits of balance could help her overcome her fear of open spaces. Chris says: 'It was also a great benefit to me. I'd arrive absolutely shattered from work and would leave feeling a remarkable difference and my friend has vastly improved.'

One of his newest pupils Jill agrees: 'I'm probably the most screwed up person you can imagine but after working for 40 minutes I am floating. You have never seen a

group who can chatter as much as this lot and they can work in silence for an hour – it's remarkable.'

It seems there's a real thirst in rural areas for making a change and having fun doing it. Thirty people came along to Toni's first 'Back to Netball' training session in Melbourne. Coach Emma Warren says: 'Back to netball proved very popular right from the beginning. I have thoroughly enjoyed coaching the sport and seeing the women develop their skills. The social and fun side of the game is a important aspect of the sessions.'

Toni jokes that her jogging club has proved such a hit that if you're walking through Repton on a Wednesday evening you have to dodge the runners! She's very proud that nineteen of her novice runners ran the South Derbyshire 5k and one even completed the London marathon.

Her ultimate ambition though is to get South Derbyshire jumping for joy by introducing trampolining into local schools. You never know what hidden potential she might spark off. □