

Right: Claire Gulliver at the Olympic Stadium in Sydney.



Norfolk is rising to the challenge!

For Norfolk, the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games is not just about five weeks of elite athletes running around a track. It presents a much wider and unprecedented opportunity for many sectors to engage, not least for dance organisations and artists. **Claire Gulliver**, Norfolk Development Officer for the 2012 Games, explains...

London's bid to become the 2012 host city for the Olympic and Paralympic Games promised the first 'national Games'- in other words, a Games where the benefits and opportunities to engage are not limited to the capital, but through projects and initiatives that would span the whole of

the UK. The task of LOCOG (the London Organising Committee for the Olympic and Paralympic Games) and Nations and Regions groupings across the country to promote and deliver these various programmes is a huge one, one that hasn't been undertaken before, and Norfolk is stepping up to

the mark in achieving the most we can for our businesses, organisations and residents.

Following the news that London had been successful in securing the Games for the UK, Norfolk spared little time before planning for the opportunities that lay ahead. An >



Above: Norfolk County Council Adult Education Flamenco Dance Group at Synergy - The Whitlingham Outdoor Festival, Norfolk. Photo: Alan Howard.

“through public celebrations and cultural and sporting events we can motivate the wider population to be more active and improve health outcomes.”



Above: Passion Productions Dance Company at The Garage, Norwich.

Economic Impact Study carried out for the Eastern region in 2006 showed that the Games has the potential to bring financial gains in the form of domestic and international business and visitors, with Norfolk having the greatest tourism offer of all Eastern region counties. By supporting and demonstrating the achievements of our local athletes we can inspire young people to find their own talent and be the best they can be. And through public celebrations and cultural and sporting events we can motivate the wider population to be more active and improve health outcomes. But only with intervention and by being proactive could all this be achieved...

So, Norfolk has produced a strategy and action plan for the next four years, under the ‘Norfolk Celebrating Talent’ brand. Norfolk County Council has also committed £100,000 per annum to our Olympic programme on the basis of its contribution to one of three strategic ambitions for Norfolk - an aspirational county with high levels of attainment. The funding has enabled the appointment of a dedicated Development Officer for the 2012 Games and the development of new sporting and cultural programmes for Norfolk which will leave the legacy of increased access and participation opportunities.

To support the county’s most promising 14-25 year-old athletes in their ambitions to compete at Vancouver 2010 or London 2012, Norfolk County Council has set up and funded the Norfolk Sports and Cultural Foundation. The Foundation is unique in that it provides support for talented young people in the arts as well as in

sports, so they can progress in their careers to perform on a national or international stage. So far, the Foundation has provided up to £5,000 each for twelve sporting Rising Stars and two cultural Rising Stars - who have now become our Team Norfolk!

As part of their support agreement, Team Norfolk is committed to working in school and community settings to inspire other young people and to share their achievements and ambitions with them. Normally this is alongside the county’s Gold Ambassadors, a collection of Norfolk’s top established athletes including ex-Olympians and Paralympians, professional footballers and international or European champions. This scheme of ambassadors is effective as it provides mentoring for our upcoming athletes and stars of the future from recognised professionals within their field, but also gives children in schools the chance to interact with young people of similar ages and backgrounds who have applied themselves and are achieving their dreams.

Scott Atkins, aged 24 and from Norwich, is one of our Cultural Rising Stars who has been supported this year through the Norfolk Sports and Cultural Foundation. Scott is an incredibly gifted dancer and choreographer, who in 2008 set up his own youth dance company, Passion Productions. Passion Productions are based at The Garage, a youth dance and performance venue in Norwich, which is also the home to Norfolk Dance, the county’s lead dance development organisation. Scott was identified as an emerging star of the

future by the rehearsal director and manager of the musical *Cats* during their recent tour at Norwich Theatre Royal. As a result of the funding Scott has received one of the activities he is planning is a month-long residency with the Matthew Bourne Company at Sadlers Wells in May.

As well as supporting young people at the top of their game, our aim is to engage all people in Norfolk in the excitement and opportunities in the lead to 2012, and in doing this we celebrated the Olympic handover on 24 August last year in style. On board a vintage London Routemaster bus with David Beckham-lookalike Andy Harmer, we travelled to various locations across Norfolk flying our local authority London 2012 flag with pride. During the course of the day, sites at Pensthorpe (north-west of Norfolk), Great Yarmouth (east of Norfolk), Wroxham (centre of Norfolk), Whitlingham (south of Norfolk), and Norwich were visited to raise awareness about our four-year Norfolk Celebrating Talent programme and how everyone can play a part and get involved. We also enlisted the support of Arts Award students and school sports ambassadors to help us spread the word and sprinkle some of that magic dust from the Games coming to the UK in 2012.

The Cultural Olympiad launch weekend on 26 -28 September saw the start of a UK-wide programme of culture and creativity arising from the London 2012 Games. In Norfolk, many open celebratory events took place, including *The Body Electric*, a light and sound film projection on the side of Norwich Castle depicting dance and

Right: Scarabeus at Synergy - The Whitlingham Outdoor Festival, Norfolk. Photo: Alan Howard.



movement by internationally acclaimed artists Dawood/ Decora and a specially commissioned piece of dance from young artists based at The Garage called New Eyes, and was their response to The Body Electric and gave a fresh take on the city of Norwich.

In partnership with The Garage, Norwich Arts Centre, Active Norfolk and other local authorities, education providers and organisations in the county, a cultural and sporting festival called Synergy took place for the first time in the beautiful setting of Whitlingham Country Park. The aim of Synergy was first and foremost to celebrate the start of the Cultural Olympiad and to raise the profile of our plans and partners in Norfolk- as well as providing residents and visitors with a fantastic family day out. Synergy offered inspiring displays of cultural excellence and one of these came in the form of the breathtaking Scarabeus, an aerial dance company, who elegantly performed from the award winning architectural structure of the Whitlingham Outdoor Education Centre. It also gave local organisations the chance to perform or to showcase what they do- in fact, Passion Productions performed on the day, as did local flamenco and Capoeira dance groups. The event gave 'exit routes' for visitors who participated in activities on the day, by joining the groups who offered the taster sessions or by signposting participants to their own local clubs. Our evaluation from Synergy has shown from a sample of the 4,000+ people who attended the event, 91% would like to try new activities in the future.

The Synergy event is a great example of the 'festival effect', and how this can lead to increased activity and participation amongst audiences. Synergy certainly inspired the many people who came and successfully communicated the fact that the Games are not just about elite sport, but about coming together to share in joint celebration, about local pride and about being inspired to do more and to be more. This year, we aim to work with the Lifestyles Festival in Kings Lynn along the same lines as the Synergy event, to widen our partnership across the county.

We will certainly be keeping up the momentum and working alongside the various national projects that are a part of the UK-wide Cultural Olympiad. The Synergy event achieved the London 2012 Inspire Mark in recognition of its contribution to the

three core values of welcoming the world, inspiring young people and delivering a legacy. Our hope is to work with more of our cultural partners to promote the Inspire Mark and to increase the number of events achieving the use of this London 2012 brand in Norfolk. We are working with other local authorities to identify the major project opportunities through the Cultural Olympiad, and how we can work better together to pool our resources and effort, and therefore have a greater impact across the county. But perhaps our greatest task is to continue to communicate and promote the opportunities that lie ahead to the population of a large, rural county – but we are on the case...

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