

Inspiring an Olympic generation

As the London 2012 Paralympic Games draws ever nearer, youth leadership programme Dreams and Teams is helping students from 103 schools in China establish sports clubs and organise 20 Olympic-related festivals in five different cities.

The programme uses sport and arts as a platform for young people in different countries to develop leadership skills, active citizenship and international awareness and explore issues such as fair play, inclusion and cultural diversity.

A Dreams and Teams sports festival recently organised by students in the megacity of Chongqing provided a tangible illustration of the London 2012 motto 'Inspire a Generation'. It also demonstrated the once-in-a-generation opportunity the Games offer to forge international connections through our cultural relations work.

Entrusted with unusually broad responsibilities in a country that reveres traditional academic success, the secondary school students who organised the sports festival drew on their Dreams and Teams training when planning the event.

Together they recruited 3,000 participants, aged seven to 17, from 58 different schools. They also assembled a complex schedule of events, secured media and commercial sponsors, designed logos, wrote a theme song, and ensured that the values of cross-cultural understanding, fair play and equity permeated the well-attended festival.

The festival's opening ceremony celebrated cultural diversity as students represented 58 countries in performances informed by their studies. And to promote inclusion, the sporting events that followed were designed to allow students with disabilities to compete.

Above all, it was the participants' own diversity that made a powerful impact. One young leader explained that he used to only feel pity for the blind, but collaborating with visually impaired students allowed him to see beyond simple stereotypes: 'I felt real happiness working with them on the festival theme song and realised that they are just as smart as we are.'

Zhu Jingping from the local education authority thanked the programme for training 'talented students who can run any kind of activity.' Indeed, Dreams and Teams supports China's shift

from an exam-focused education system to one that encourages all-round development to better prepare young people for the future.

Before competing in the sports events, Simon Lever, British Consul General in Chongqing, framed the festival in a wider context: 'A sporting legacy was at the heart of our Olympic bid – we wanted to harness the power of the Olympic and Paralympic Games to inspire more young people into sport.' He then praised Dreams and Teams for enshrining that legacy.

For Lucy Watkins, Director Programmes China, 'the festival's success shows that the Olympics are highly resonant in China thanks to the legacy of the Beijing Games. And by highlighting the [British Council's link to London 2012](#) through our website, media outreach and a range of Olympic-themed activity we are tapping into this legacy to build trust and create opportunity for the UK.'



The Chongqing festival's opening ceremony



British Consul General in Chongqing, Simon Lever with visually impaired students at the festival



British Consul General in Chongqing - Simon Lever competing in the Big Hands Small Hands race