



MEDIA RELEASE 1 JUNE 2006

DELIVERING THE DREAM

On August Bank Holiday weekend a forty acre site in Bridgnorth will be ringing to the sound of children, young people and their families enjoying themselves at the Shropshire town's first ever Children's Festival.

The Festival can claim an international athlete patron, backing from a professional football club, performances from an international jester and scores of volunteers from the local community and a year ago it wasn't even an idea.

We spoke with Festival organisers to discover what has driven the major effort in producing an event of this nature.

Stephen Derges, Chairman of Children's Festival (Bridgnorth) Ltd., the charitable company responsible for the Festival explained how it had come about.

"We are really responding to a number of family-related issues in society at present. Every parent will recognise that taking a family anywhere these days is ridiculously expensive. Recent studies have shown that children and young people are less active today than at any time and spend the majority of their time alone watching TV or playing on their computers.

Like most parents I'd often wondered what could be done in a place like Bridgnorth to actively engage our young people in new interests that would benefit them and spark an entirely new way of spending their free time.

One day last year my wife and I were on holiday driving through Southern Ireland and we both saw a road sign to 'The Children's Festival'. Neither of us commented on it at the time but about an hour later (and over dinner that evening) we found ourselves beginning to explore the possibilities of putting a small event on for young people in Shropshire. At that stage we had no real idea about the content, a site or how to fund it.

However things started to fall into place. On the day we returned to Bridgnorth from our holiday it was announced that the Folk Festival was leaving Bridgnorth which meant that there was an available site over the August Bank Holiday – our preferred date. We started talking about the dream to a few friends who immediately began to develop our initial thoughts.

The group of people we started to involve came up with some excellent ideas and soon the concept had moved away from a

small one-off event to creating a true Festival across a large site under a tented village. We have deliberately identified it as a Festival because that's the feel we want to achieve. This is something where people of all ages can try a hundred new things in a day if they want to."

Local involvement has been vitally important to the Festival and all of the schools in the area backed the scheme from day one. Roger Davies, the Head of Oldbury Wells School and the Governors were enthusiastic about using the school site and gave every backing for the Festival.

A charitable company was formed to ensure that everything was managed professionally and that grants for the Festival could be accessed and properly accounted for.

Stephen comments,

"Everyone in the company is a volunteer and every penny goes directly to the Festival in terms of equipment and events. It is really important to us that this is clear because we aim to put on something that mixes a memorable Festival with a local flavour".

The organisers are determined to ensure that the Festival will contain events that children and young people themselves want, not an adult's ideas of what they should have. So a major consultation took place with children from all the local schools last autumn from which many workable (and a number of un-workable) ideas were developed.

Since then the Festival team has set about obtaining grants and donations to fund the activities.

Finance Director Mark Anderson is keen to stress the contribution local people, councils and businesses have played in the event.

"It quickly became obvious that the idea resonated with a great many people. Several local companies joined our sponsorship scheme, others offered equipment or facilities, a number of business on Bridgnorth's High Street joined together to donate a percentage of every sale made in June to the Festival. The key thing that has shone through has been that businesses want to be associated with events that contribute to the future of the town. We will be widely publicising all those who have assisted in this way and there is still an opportunity to do so.

Private individuals have also signed up to a sponsorship scheme of a few pounds each week to help the Festival. We reckon we need 500 people each pledging £50 to make the dream a reality. And let's face it, I can easily spend £50 in one go just filling my car up with petrol these days!

The local Councils have been very helpful with advice and officer time and councillors also have given us their full backing. We have secured a number of grants including one from Bridgnorth District Arts and Bridgnorth Town Council kindly donated a £4,000 grant. We are continuing to pursue other grant funding bodies in order to extend the Festival further."

On an individual level many local people have offered their services for a few hours over the weekend.

Karen Gibbons, Volunteer Co-ordinator, recognised the impact of giving something back to their local community.

"You see it all the time in Bridgnorth. Whether it is supporting the Charity Walk or helping at a small community group, people want to help. The Festival provides the chance for volunteers to have a great deal of fun and be part of something which we hope will grow over the years. My list of volunteers is getting longer all the time but there is something for everyone who is interested They simply need to contact me on 01746 764151 or through the Festival website".

Festival events are increasing all the time and Mark Gibbons, Events Co-ordinator, is challenged by fitting it all in.

"We're already looking at ways to expand the site to accommodate everything and new event organisers are contacting us all the time. We're in contact with the new Bridgnorth Music Festival organisers and are hopeful that we can help each other. But for us, the important thing is that the Children's Festival remains centred upon children and young people and is free to enter.

I'm particularly interested in Nitro powered remote control Grand Prix we're running. Local company RC Racing have been fantastic in providing us with a full track and everything associated with it. Not only will there be a major competition over the weekend but there will be opportunities for young people to have a go themselves during the 'hands-on' sessions.

With Wolverhampton Wanderers providing soccer skills coaching and other local sports clubs involved we will have a great variety of activities over the weekend."

Other events at the Festival include:

- Sports coaching with Wolverhampton Wanderers and Bridgnorth Rugby Club
- Circus Skills, Magicians, Stilt-walkers and Entertainers
- Tennis and Swimming
- PC Games giant link up
- An Arts & Crafts Zone
- Fusion 2006 run by the Council with BMX-ing and in-line Skating
- Disco dancing for all, theatre workshops, competitions and challenges, frisby heaven and lots more.

Stephen Derges sums it all up,

"This is a Festival for the community organised and funded by people who live in the community. And we're not just talking about the people of Bridgnorth either – we want to include the local villages and rural areas around the town. A number of people outside of the town have pledged their support and are actively involved in helping us.

What started off almost as a dream is slowly but surely becoming a reality. It's our hope that this will eventually turn into a major event that people will be proud of. We could still do with more help – physical and financial – and more information is available

***on our website (generously donated by a local company) –
www.childrens-festival.co.uk.”***

<ENDS>

Notes For Editors

The Festival will take place on Saturday 26 (10am -5.30pm) and Sunday 27 August 2006 (10.am-8.30pm) at Oldbury Wells School Site. It will end with a celebratory event on Sunday evening. The site was previously used by the Bridgnorth Folk Festival on August Bank Holidays.

Correspondence regarding the Festival should be directed to:

Children's Festival (Bridgnorth) Limited, c/o Life Choices,
1 & 2 Central Court, High Street, Bridgnorth, Shropshire WV16 4DB

Alternatively please contact individual members of the organising team as follows:

The organising committee is chaired by Stephen Derges (01746 763173)

stephen.derges@childrens-festival.co.uk

Mark & Karen Gibbons (01746 764151) are also main contacts for the Festival handling event co-ordination and volunteers.

mark.gibbons@childrens-festival.co.uk, karen.gibbons@childrens-festival.co.uk

Mark Anderson is managing Festival finances

mark.anderson@childrens-festival.co.uk

John Harris is the media contact

john.harris@childrens-festival.co.uk (01746 765336)

The organising team consists of Senior Teaching professionals, Members of the Business community, youth workers and advisors. County, Town and District Councillors have pledged their support.

Events in the Festival have been decided following detailed consultation with young people in Bridgnorth during November/December 2005.

The Festival website is www.childrens-festival.co.uk

All of the schools in the area support the Festival and have pledged support.

Individuals working directly with young people as part of this initiative will comply with CRB checking processes.

The Children's Festival is organised by a charitable company.

Photo opportunities will be available throughout the festival.

Festival Patron is Chris Davies International Athlete who has represented the United Kingdom at middle distance running events and Wales at the Commonwealth Games.