

## **Olympic spirit burns bright at Homeless Games**

Well over 400 people took part in this year's Homeless Games in Liverpool.

This unique event was open to anyone in the North West aged 18 and over who is homeless, or has been within the last two years.

Described by some as the Homeless Olympics, the two-day event at Wavertree Sports Park saw competitors take part in events such as swimming, football, cycling, badminton, and even some 'alternative' sports such as chess, pool and tiddlywinks!

In its second year, the Homeless Games is the brainchild of Anfield man Eric Houghton, 46. The father-of-two became homeless himself after a series of family bereavements saw his life spiral out of control. Eric lost his family, home and job, and fell into alcohol abuse, before turning his life around by taking part in the 2002 Homeless World Cup.

Using a start-up grant from Cosmopolitan Housing Association, Eric pulled together a successful event which has now seen hundreds more homeless people enjoy a range of empowering activities in a supportive environment.

Eric, who now works as a support worker for homeless people in Liverpool, said: "I thought it was a great idea but we struggled to get funding initially – so that grant from Cosmopolitan made all the difference. We learned a lot from the first event in 2010, and this year's was even better.

"Getting involved in something positive like sport can give homeless people the sense of self-worth and community that they need. Although the Games only lasted for two days, we hope the effects will last a lot longer, and show people how much they can achieve."

The 2011 Games were a huge success, with the planned closing ceremony at Liverpool Town Hall having to be relocated due to the unexpectedly high number of participants.

Current patrons of the Games include Olympians Beth Tweddle, David Price and Steve Smith, as well as international goalkeeper Rachel Brown and Miss Galaxy UK Melissa Reeves.

As well as the sporting events, those attending were given the opportunity to benefit from health and wellbeing services such as massage and alternative therapies, health MOTs, sexual health advice, cancer and diabetes screening and help with stopping smoking or dealing with substance abuse.

The 2011 Homeless Games was supported by a host of local organisations, including Cosmopolitan Housing Association, Chester & District Housing Trust, Merseyside Police, Liverpool PCT, Sefton PCT, Sefton Council, Knowsley Council, Arena Housing, Liverpool Housing Trust, One Vision Housing, Riverside, the Lighthouse Project, Knowsley Housing Trust and Liverpool City Council.