



# A festival first

By Diana Cormack

On 23 June, stage and weather permitting, there will be a dance performance that has never before been seen at the East Finchley Community Festival. *The Happy Go Lucky Social Dance Group* hope to be entertaining the crowd with their movements, but the difference between them and other performers is that they will be in wheelchairs.

The group was formed 15 years ago and is now run in Barnet by Community Focus, which organises activities for the disabled throughout the Borough and includes schools in its remit. Members meet weekly in Mill Hill and East Finchley is represented there not only by some of the participants, but also by the dance teacher.

### Born to dance

Mother of three Lesley Chowen, of Sylvester Road, took up the post six years ago after answering a newspaper advert for a dance tutor. She was well qualified, having done a dance leader in the community course, which covered those with disabilities. Lesley is also a qualified Extend teacher, which includes safe forms of exercise for the elderly and disabled. Her CV is impressive too.

All Lesley ever wanted to do was dance and, having attended dancing school as a child, she took up full time dance and drama training at the age of 16. She began her professional work at the age of 19, working in the provinces for three years before moving to London. She travelled widely with the Second Generation dance group and, as a freelance, did a lot of television work on shows such as *Morecambe and Wise*, *The Two Ronnies*, *Little and Large* and the *Kenny Everett* series.

Lesley, who settled in East Finchley in 1981, performed in trade shows and conferences all over the world but stopped in 1986 when she gave birth to her first child. She took up teaching

in 1989, having had a second baby, and held local classes for youngsters, which included street dance at the Finchley Youth Theatre in the High Road.

There are plans to move from the Mill Hill meeting place, possibly to somewhere nearer East Finchley. The group has able-bodied as well as disabled members and there is a wide age range. They meet on Mondays from 7.30 - 9.30 pm. If you are interested in joining them, please telephone Community Focus on 020 8346 9789 and look out for them at the festival.



Lesley Chowen with the Happy Go Lucky Dance Group. Photo by Erini Rodis



Face painting at the Festival with Community Focus

## Disabled and Talented!

By Emma Seery

**The Community Focus Drama Group aims to raise awareness of Disabled Talent at this year's East Finchley Festival.**

Funded by the National Lottery's Award for All, Community Focus Drama Group is preparing for a spectacular performance, which is to be previewed at the East Finchley Arts Festival on 29 June. The group of disabled participants will present a vibrant show called *Fantasy Fanfare* at All Saints Arts Centre, Durham Road N2. Special carnival puppets that can be attached to and controlled from wheelchairs will provide entertainment for all.

Community Focus is a registered charity for disabled people of mixed ages and abilities in Barnet. The group has been established for eight years and offers a diverse range of artistic skills, from drama and dance to painting, creative writing and ICT.

### Recognition

At the East Finchley Community Festival on 23 June, Community Focus dancers will exhibit and join in the procession. The group also intends to hold a face-painting stall.

Maria Bartha, manager of Community Focus, told *THE ARCHER* that the group is to take part in the Festival for the first time this year. She stressed the importance of recognising disabled talent in the community and spoke of "raising awareness of disabled people and artists in general". She went on to express her hope that through the group's involvement in the Festival, Community Focus would "become better known in the Community" prior to the opening of the Borough's new arts depot centre, in 2004.

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