

Coming Together is a Beginning...

Despite being a part of Irish radio and television life since 2008, it wasn't until 2013 that Eastern Harps GAA Club was brave enough to launch our own version of Operation Transformation. Why did we need to be brave? Because we were about to approach 100 local people and try persuading them to let us take over their lives for seven weeks, with threats of weekly fitness classes, boot camps, Sunday walks up hills and around lakes and, worst of all, a dreaded weekly weigh-in! We recruited leaders, brought in the formidable duo of Ray and Karl from Actifit Sligo, crossed our fingers on launch night, and hoped the people would come - they did! Not 100 as we'd hoped for, but 120. We had the help and support of Sligo Sports and Recreation Partnership, and had some invaluable advice from Gurteen Health Centre. John Lavin from Lavin's Outfitters, Ballymote and Damian Tansey from Tansey's Centra Gurteen offered some tempting prizes and sponsorship, and it was game on!

Keeping Together is Progress...

That was year one. We weren't alone on launch night earlier this year either. Our team leaders were coaxed, cajoled or charmed into taking on the challenge, and in turn they used whatever bait they had at their disposal to hook their team-mates. Soon a staggering 165 spirited individuals were ready to test themselves. Some worried they were too old, too unfit, or hadn't the time, but from day one these concerns were thrown out the window and everybody gave it their all. We had participants of all shapes and sizes, male, female, fit and a little out of shape, with an age range of eighteen to seventy.

Flocks of children willingly joined parents and grandparents every Sunday on the family walks. These walks were held in different locations weekly, the best attended outing was in the famed and fantastic Forest Park in Boyle. Some walks took place in the worst weather this region has seen for decades, but rather than inhibit people, it galvanised our efforts and it was a common sight to see buggies and pushchairs with bemused little faces peering out from their vantage point at the wind and rain swept terrain of the Harps area.



A couple on fresh taskmasters joined the crew this year, Ollie came on board with Actifit, and took no nonsense from anyone!! Alan Williams emerged and was a big hit, as he should have been - Thumpboxing is his discipline after all! Despite the name of his sport, we had no black eyes or knockouts, this is a non-contact sport. Our sponsor from 2013 came back on board and we had a brand new sponsor for 2014, Sásta Fitness, Carrick-on-Shannon.

Working Together is Success!!

So, did we all get fitter and lost some body weight? Yes absolutely we did, as a group we are 105 stone lighter than we were at the turn of the year. And we can walk a little faster, jog a little longer. The club's development fund is looking healthier to boot, and a finale night raffle brought in €800 for the event's chosen charity, North West Hospice.

These are all easily measurable statistics, what isn't so easy to measure is the other impact an initiative such as this has on a community. Operation Transformation will stand out in the minds of people, not for the reasons mentioned previously but for the social interactivity it created in the area. The end of the Celtic Tiger and the onset of a biting recession meant socialising in pubs and other costly entertainment took a big hit. This novel idea brought people out again and lifted the spirits. People from all corners of the club area & some very welcome friends from neighbouring areas came together time and again, several times a week for seven weeks, and an amazing sense of camaraderie developed as brand new friendships were struck up. People who lived within a couple of miles of each other met for the first time, or had reason to walk together and chat with a common goal in mind. All involved encouraged people they hardly knew the week before, stood in aisles of supermarkets and discussed the agony of the hills on last week's walk. At times on some of the more inclement Saturday mornings, they threw their eyes skywards in exasperation when hopes were raised by the jingle of a text, only to be dashed within seconds upon reading.....

"Bootcamp going ahead despite monsoon conditions....Keep the Faith!!!"



But it was okay, because we were all going to look like drowned rats together. And that is the key to this event, we all got up and did this together, and we are all the better for it, a richer community, a more inclusive Club.

So the curtain came down on "Eastern Harps Operation Transformation 2014" in Drury's Bar & Lounge in Monasteraden on last Saturday night, March 1st. Having just completed a seven week action packed programme we weren't afraid to let our hair down and party, and we were ably encouraged by the rollicking music and song provided by the brilliant Sligo band, Smile!

Oh, and remember some had doubts as to whether they might not fit the OT profile?? When we announced our "Biggest Losers" it was realised that they were our two most inspirational participants and our two oldest. They had quietly wiped the floor with the rest of us, our hugely popular winners, congratulations Mary O'Grady and Pat Cryan, you showed us how it's done!



Our Operation Transformation winners this year, Pat Cryan and Mary O'Grady, receiving their prizes from Emer in Sásta, Carrick-on-Shannon.