



Ping! serves up another spectacular summer

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It's been a record-breaking year for Ping!, the nation's biggest street festival, with an estimated ONE MILLION visits to its free table tennis tables.

When Ping! first exploded on to the streets of London five years ago, no-one could have predicted that by the summer of 2015 there would be a thousand free to play tables popping up in the public spaces of 19 towns and cities all over England, from Teesside to Penzance; and that the public would flock to play on them in their hundreds of thousands.

Mrs Attellesey in Plymouth explained that Ping! was "Great Fun – a great initiative and I will continue to play" while Laura Bone hopes "to be playing table tennis for years to come". And this is the aim of the project – to get more people active in table tennis on an on-going basis.

So although the festival may be over for this year the Ping! legacy will see some of the outdoor permanent tables remaining in parks and estates while others will be donated to organisations for the benefit of the community; such as the Applegarth Care Home who have just gratefully received a Ping! Sheffield table for use by their residents. The Ping! website has a 'play on' feature where you can find places to play in formal and informal settings; <http://www.pingengland.co.uk/#playon>.

The Ping! festival is managed and delivered by Table Tennis England in partnership with local authorities and a wide range of creative and cultural organisations; the tables and equipment are provided free of charge thanks to funding from Sport England and are for the general public to play on around the clock, popping up in surprising places such as railway stations, beaches, parks, stately homes, shopping centres and even an airport!

Mr Powell in Birmingham couldn't believe his luck when he stumbled across a Ping! table: "Awesome – and it's free – nothing's free!" and Simon Davis in Chelmsford felt the same "It is such a nice and just pleasant change to be able to enjoy a family event for free".

Ping! 2015 had a powerful impact on lives.

Some of the most touching stories this summer came from elderly participants who used to play table tennis and have visited the Ping! tables with their grandchildren which reignited their passion and many of them now continuing to play in a social setting. Mrs Lithauer, visiting Ping! Chelmsford, said she "got kicked off so that my husband (29) and my Nan (79) could have a grudge match!"

In Exeter a Ping! table was introduced to autistic youngsters. SW Autism Support Services told us: "As Autism is a lifelong social disability the young people find social situations challenging, but while they would find sitting down and having a conversation extremely difficult they CAN talk if they are focussing on an activity such as table tennis."

A vacant shop space in Plymouth, converted into a 'Ping Pong Parlour' with eight Ping! tables, saw a Syrian refugee emerge who unveiled himself as the former national coach for Syria, telling Ping! volunteers of his history within the sport and of how he escaped to the UK. The Ping! team encouraged him to continue attending the Parlour and he is now part of the Joola Plymouth club coaching team, developing gifted and talented players in the local area.

The Ping! Plymouth team also spotted a young Chinese boy called Yang who was obviously pretty useful with a bat. However due to language barriers, Yang had not played since arriving in the UK over a year ago. Thanks to the intervention of the Ping! team, Yang is now receiving additional English lessons at school and table tennis coaching at his local club. Such is his success story that he recently represented the club at the Devon County Championships.



Power2Inspire's John Willis

Cambridge man John Willis, the founder of Power2Inspire an organisation which helps disabled and able bodied people to come together in sport, and himself born without fully formed limbs has had a special prosthetic built with a grip attachment for bats and racquets. On a city centre Ping! table he was delighted to find his new arm worked a treat and has discovered a passion for ping pong. From John's blog: 'I do really want to play again and preferably regularly. I will find a club happy to accommodate. A great outcome for a very good day'.

Random Acts of Ping Pong!

Ping! is not just about conventional table tennis. Many of the cities hosted fun events, competitions and activities around their Ping! tables for the public to enjoy for free. Brighton held the chef's frying pan championships using cooking implements as bats, while *Pizza Pong* in Middlesbrough used pizza pan paddles, there was *ShopPing!* in Leicester and *Battle of the Paddle* in Bristol used the Ping! tables to host their fun business networking events.

The cast of Shrek took a break from performances at Plymouth's Theatre Royal to take to the tables, while in Newquay there was a 'longest rally with a flip flop' record attempt!



The cast of Shrek take to the tables at Drakes Circus
Plymouth

The feelgood factor

A common misconception is that the unsupervised tables will get vandalised and equipment stolen; in reality this rarely happens – Ping! seems to bring out the best in people. In fact, in Sheffield the city management team reported that throughout the Ping! project they had seen a significant decrease in crime and anti-social behaviour within the city centre, it appears the tables are a welcome distraction and are respected by the public.

Getting workplaces in the Loop too

Building on the success of Ping!, Table Tennis England has launched 'Loop', an initiative to encourage participation in social table tennis in a range of non-sporting settings. Loop brings ping pong to the workplace; to bars and cafes, universities and clubhouses.

To help businesses bring all the health and well-being benefits of offering table tennis to their employees, they've teamed up with Sport England and equipment suppliers to offer superb 'Beat the Boss' packages starting from just £160 which include tables, bats, balls, trophies! For more information about Loop visit

www.keepintheLOOP.co.uk.

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