

INTERVIEW -DUBLINSOUTH FM

Sabrina: Good afternoon and welcome to another edition of 'We've got Issues' here on 93.9 DublinSouthFM, your local access radio station for the Dublin South area. If you'd like to get in contact with us here in the studio, you can call us on (01) 2960939. You can email us at Sabrinadsfm@gmail.com or, alternatively, send us a text on (087) 939 2000. Today in studio, I have Lorelei Fox-Roberts; she is the Communications and Fundraising Assistant with Deaf Sports Ireland... Good afternoon Lorelei.

Lorelei: Good afternoon Sabrina.

Sabrina: Am I saying that right?

Lorelei: You are (laughs).

Sabrina: It's such an unusual name.

Lorelei: Just to keep, people guessing, keep them on their toes.

Sabrina: What's the origin of that name?

Lorelei: It's a German name. It's actually a mythical mermaid from the Rhine.

Sabrina: That's a wonderful story to have about your name! I like that you've probably been asked so often.

Lorelei: Yeah, it's brilliant though (laughs).

Sabrina: Exactly, exactly. Well, I kind of get it as well because my name is Sabrina; it's ever so slightly unusual. Not as unusual as yours...

Lorelei: But still unusual.

Sabrina: And do you know what? That's what makes us unique!

Lorelei: It is.

Sabrina: And considering, on the topic of unique, Deaf Sports Ireland is rather an unusual organisation for it provides such a wonderful outlet for Deaf athletes.

Lorelei: Well yeah, Deaf Sports Ireland is actually the National Governing Body for Deaf Sports within all 32 counties of Ireland, so it's on both sides of the border as well and it is kind of the only organisation that's aimed specifically for the Deaf community or towards the Deaf community rather.

Sabrina: And how many athletes would you have ...how many people take part in Deaf Sports across the country?

Lorelei: Oh, it would vary depending on the activity. There are hundreds of members and then there'd be roughly about 1,500 Deaf students within mainstream schools and they'd often be brought in to raise awareness and to get them involved in Deaf sports groups as well. Depending on the

activity, it could be anywhere from five to six people, to a hundred, two hundred people.

Sabrina: And it seems kind of like a simple idea, I mean I would never have assumed that Deaf children or Deaf adults would ever be excluded from activities, but seemingly they would be if there needs to be an inclusion strategy there for them.

Lorelei: Yeah, well one of the main issues faced, particularly in mainstream schools, or mainstream sports clubs is that there's actually a really big communication barrier. All of the sports are based around audio signals rather than visual ones, you know like referees blowing a whistle, or calling out to team mates and that can really separate the Deaf members then from the rest of the group then and that can end up being really quite socially excluded, which is why it's so great that there is an organisation now, in place that can provide activities that are geared specifically towards deaf athletes.

Sabrina: So, would this be a case of- instead of blowing a whistle, that there's hand signals?

Lorelei: Yes, absolutely. In fact, in the Deaflympics they use entirely visual signals, so they use flags and lights and hand signals, rather than using whistles or bullhorns or gunshots to start off tournaments.

Sabrina: Well I was actually researching the Deaflympics, I thought it was a lovely touch that the spectators are not encouraged to cheer, they're encouraged to wave with both hands...

Lorelei: Yeah...

Sabrina: ... which is really lovely? I imagine it's very visually intriguing to see everybody instead...would it be very silent then?

Lorelei: Well I imagine it would be quite silent, because nobody's really needing to speak and everyone will be signing and whilst all of the Deaf athletes will come and they would primarily sign with their own native country's Sign Language, like there'd be Irish Sign Language and British Sign Language etc. There's also International Sign Language which removes that communication barrier again, so all of the athletes from the various different countries can sign with one another, despite being from other countries.

Sabrina: Would ASL, that's the American branding of Sign Language, would that be kind of closer to the international?

Lorelei: I'm actually not sure; I'm not that familiar with ASL. I mean, a lot of them seem to have quite similar roots for some words or some signs but then again some of them differ completely in the way that say Irish and English are very different, even grammatically speaking they could be quite different.

Sabrina: Oh, that's rather interesting. Mean, I would just have assumed Sign Language would be a universal language, you know almost like the Esperanto of Deaf languages really.

Lorelei: Yeah, well I mean it's something that also doesn't get talked about much in the media as well, so it's something that a lot of people... you don't really hear about it, so people do just assume that there is only one.

Sabrina: Do you know Sign Language yourself?

Lorelei: Well, I'm currently learning, so gradually, bit by bit (laughs).

Sabrina: And how long have you been learn in?

Lorelei: I just finished a 10 week course and I'm about to start another 10 week course.

Sabrina: So is this like the beginning? Your beginnings?

Lorelei: Yeah

Sabrina: Is it difficult?

Lorelei: No, I mean you have to commit to it, the same way you would with learning any language, but a lot of it comes quite naturally- particularly when you're immersed in it, because like, say in our class you'd go in and you'd be encouraged not to speak at all and at first that's really daunting, because how are you going to make yourself understood? But actually you really can make yourself understood, just by , if you don't know the sign even, just doing something visual can often make it clear what you're trying to say and someone can show you the sign.

Sabrina: That's really interesting, because I mean so much of communicating is gesticulating and gesturing towards someone anyway. I tend to talk a lot with my hands anyway, our listeners can't see that but generally I'm trying to give somebody a black eye here in the studio (laughs). So would you recommend for people to try to learn Sign Language?

Lorelei: Oh absolutely, I think it's great and particularly in work places because nearly everybody, ever business has Deaf customers or Deaf clients and it's great to be able to communicate with everyone then.

Sabrina: I mean, even if it was just a case of learning the alphabet perhaps, you could just spell things out.

Lorelei: Exactly and I would do that a lot while I'm learning, like if there's a sign I don't know, I'll just spell out the word and I mean it's a bit more time consuming but you can still make yourself understood then.

Sabrina: Exactly. You've got a couple of events coming up over the next couple of weeks and months leading up to the Deaflympics...

Lorelei: We do.

Sabrina: ...One thing that I'm rather interested in is the 'Come and Try' sports that are happening over the next few weeks.

Lorelei: Yeah, well we're going to have samples of various different sports, where people can come along and try them out and see what they think of the sport and if there seems to be a high interest in any one, or a number, of them then Deaf Sports Ireland will try to arrange for that activity to run at a particular time, maybe weekly or monthly, again depending on the interest.

Sabrina: That's cool and there's five sports in particular that are going to be there for the 'Come and Try' opportunities. Those are: Archery, Rugby Tag, Orienteering, Pitch & Putt and Tennis.

Lorelei: That's right.

Sabrina: But the Deaflympics is something that I had never heard of until a couple of weeks ago, and it's the second biggest Games after the Olympic Games.

Lorelei: Yeah, and it's the second longest running, running since 1924.

Sabrina: and the first one was in Paris I believe?

Lorelei: That's right.

Sabrina: This is something that I found rather startling, that in 1924, 148 athletes from 9 European countries competed, in 2009, which was the 21st Deaflympics; there was [sic] 4,000 Deaf athletes and officials from 77 different Nations. That has expanded beyond belief...

Lorelei: Astronomically!

Sabrina: Exactly astronomically, it's wonderful to see that something can grow and expand over such a long period of time.

Lorelei: In fact actually, the Deaflympics in 2009 which you were talking about there, records were actually broken because of the number of volunteers involved, there were over 10,000 volunteers turned up for the event and they're expecting records to be broken again this year.

Sabrina: That's wonderful, and that event was on in China. So what's going to be happening over the next few weeks, with events leading up to the Deaflympics?

Lorelei: Well, as part of the preparation for the Deaflympics, a reasonable amount of fundraising needs to be done to be able to pay for the Irish Deaf Team to be able to travel over to Bulgaria for the competition, to pay for their participation fees for the competition and for the accommodation and gear and the various different requisite items. So we have a number of fundraising events coming up: We've had a bingo event, there was a silent poker event, There's a poker evening as well, there will also be a sponsored fun run, or walk if preferred on the 27th of April...

Sabrina: I find absolutely nothing fun about running (both laugh).

Lorelei: ...and a family fun day in May, there's a marathon in Belfast, we're trying to get fundraising events that appeal to a multitude of different groups as well so it's not constantly the same people that are being targeted.

Sabrina: Exactly yeah.

Lorelei: And it's a good opportunity I think, the fundraisers, to kind of have some events where you can bring the Deaf community and the hearing community together to work on it too and hopefully raise a bit more awareness, because as you were saying, a lot of people in Ireland don't even know that the Deaflympics exist and the Irish Deaf Team actually have a great track record for medals and they bring home so many, it would be nice to get that acknowledged and out there like.

Sabrina: It absolutely would, and it would also give a great opportunity for people who have no hearing impairments to actually come and meet with Hard of Hearing people, to realise that they're actually not so different.

Lorelei: No, exactly.

Sabrina: And to learn a bit more about social inclusion, which is always an enlightening experience.

Lorelei: It is.

Sabrina: So you mentioned the track record that has been there for the athletes and actually gaining medals at the Deaflympics, can you give us a little bit of history about our athletes?

Lorelei: Yes. Well, Ireland first entered a team into the Deaflympics in 1973, with two young female swimmers. Since then, we've had a team every four years, for each Deaflympics and medals have been brought home from eight of those. Since 1975, there have been 59 Gold, 46 Silver and 36 Bronze medals obtained through the Deaflympics and European Championships.

Sabrina: My God, I mean we haven't won that many Olympic medals. I mean, cummitively that's a lot more, and you just don't hear about it. Why do you think that so many of these events that are overshadowed by the Olympics, they're overshadowed by the big wins, but why is that? Why do people tend to ignore these other sports, these other feats?

Lorelei: It's kind of hard to say, I mean I suppose that it could be an unintentional kind of separation between a minority group and the mainstream group. People are seen as different, and not in any way intentionally or negatively, but they end up being very separate events. I also think that say the likes of the Paralympics has got a lot more media coverage in recent years because of its being placed so close to Ireland and the fact that the Deaflympics obviously moves from country to country but hasn't been in England or Ireland, I think that's changed the amount of awareness people have, I think that if the Deaflympics were being held this year in Dublin say there would probably be coverage in all of the National Papers.

Sabrina: There would. We like things to happen on our doorstep [pauses] and do you think that will ever happen?

Lorelei: Well you can always hope [both laugh].

Sabrina: And would Deaf Sports Ireland be the people who would put the wheels in motion for something like that to happen here?

Lorelei: To be honest, I'm not entirely sure. I guess it would be Deaf Sports Ireland working in conjunction with some of the groups we are affiliated with. We'd be affiliated with the Irish Sports Council (ISC), the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) and then the likes of Badminton Ireland, Cycle Ireland, Tennis Ireland and Swim Ireland. I mean it would probably be a group effort, with everyone coming together to work on it.

Sabrina: There seems to be a great history of swimming within the Deaflympics, it seems to be one of the main stays of the Games. I was just looking at the different sports that are involved with the Summer Games and those include: Athletics, Badminton, Basketball, Beach Volleyball, Bowling, Cycling, Football, Handball, Judo, Karate, Mountain Biking, Orienteering, Shooting, Swimming, Table Tennis, Taekwondo, Tennis, Volleyball and there are two different types of wrestling if you're that way inclined- for Freestyle or Greco Roman. I mean, there's such an array of things that go on there during the Summer Games. The Winter Games include: Alpine Skiing, Cross-Country Skiing, Curling, Ice-Hockey and Snowboarding so really it's very much that any discipline you're into, there's going to be something there for you.

Lorelei: Yeah, it really does seem to cover every sport that could possibly be brought into it.

Sabrina: And the athletes themselves that take part, what are the benefits that they see once they've started taking part in these inclusive sports and these inclusive Games?

Lorelei: Well the benefits can be seen from a grassroots level right up to the athletes that are competing at the international level, because obviously for the athletes it's a wonderful opportunity to be able to take part and compete in an elite level competition that's geared specifically towards them, so they're not going to have the communication barriers, everyone's going to be on a level footing. I mean even, for example, the use of hearing aids and Cochlear implants is prohibited so regardless of what your level of hearing is you're on the same starting point like, so that's great for the athletes, but then also it filters down to the youths that are in Deaf Sports Clubs, they can see that Deaf people are being acknowledged for their work within the sporting arena and then even those who are not necessarily involved in sports- members of the Deaf community can see this being acknowledged and it kind of builds confidence a little and through the awareness-raising it can maybe tackle social isolation a bit as well for some vulnerable people within the Deaf community.

Sabrina: And would they feel then as if they just become a greater part of a group and that they have more friends, it's really an inclusion activity?

Lorelei: Yeah, just to stop people from feeling like outsiders as well and to allow people to feel that, you know, they can do everything. Just because someone's Deaf, it doesn't make them any less capable, but say a number of people would believe that the Deaflympics should be amalgamated into the Paralympics, which you can kind of understand but I think it's great for the Deaf athletes to be able to see that there's a separate competition for them, it's not being seen as a disability to be Deaf, it's just a different kind of competition.

Sabrina: I would never think to put the Deaflympics and the Paralympics into the same bracket. I mean it seems almost counter-intuitive.

Lorelei: Yeah, well and they're quite different. Mean they're very different competitions anyway, but firstly: Deaf athletes aren't actually eligible to enter unless they have a physical impairment as well, but also a lot of Deaf athletes would feel that they had an unfair advantage. If there's a runner who is Deaf but the other people that they're running against, maybe they have prosthetic limbs it doesn't really seem like a level footing.

Sabrina: No, it certainly wouldn't be. I find the idea of the disallowance for hearing aids and Cochlear implants very interesting, because it really does bring it back down to a base level for everybody to start like that. I mean, I imagine it would almost be viewed like steroids.

Lorelei: Well I suppose yeah, because someone might have absolutely no hearing at all and then be competing against someone who is Hard of Hearing or maybe has partial hearing and it might not make a difference, it might not give one an advantage or anything, but it's really nice – it gives it more of an inclusive feel, that everyone is just exactly the same.

Sabrina: It really does hammer home the point that we're all the same, even if you have got hearing, we're all the same.

Lorelei: Absolutely.

Sabrina: Which is really the point of all these things anyway. I suppose we should really consider these Deaf athletes to be elite athletes.

Lorelei: Oh absolutely, yes.

Sabrina: Do you think there's room for them to be competing in the ordinary Olympics?

Lorelei: Well think so yeah, a number of Deaf athletes may actually consider doing so. It's just a matter of going through the same processes but with a different competition and because of them being held one year apart, because obviously the Olympics was last year (2012), there is the opportunity to compete in both, it's not that it has to be either one or the other as they're not running simultaneously.

Sabrina: Tell us a bit more about what's actually coming up in July, where is it on?

Lorelei: The events will be being held in two Bulgarian cities- Sofia and Pravets, they're roughly 60 km apart. The majority of the tournaments will be held in Sofia, with the Football being held in Pravets. Now the Deaflympics itself runs from the 26th of July until the 4th of August, that'll include the opening ceremonies, the closing ceremonies and all of the competitions with.

Sabrina: So, it very much follows the same style as the Olympics as well?

Lorelei: Oh, very much!

Sabrina: I imagine a huge, explosive opening ceremony and an equally wonderful closing ceremony, as we saw with London last year.

Lorelei: Yeah and particularly as that is a great opportunity to have a visual, spectacular show.

Sabrina: Of course, it seems like common sense really doesn't it? I imagine then, that it would probably be heavily visual- their opening and closing ceremonies. Would there be room for music in there?

Lorelei: Well this will be the first Deaflympics that I myself have attended. I've seen some videos on YouTube of the opening and closing ceremonies from previous years and some of them seem to involve music, but it's more a secondary...

Sabrina: It's not the main event, yeah, yeah. Now personally, this is going to sound awful, I did not watch the opening ceremony for the London Olympics. I seem to be the only person in the entire world that hasn't actually watched it, but it seems to be something that was so heavily based around the music. Everybody talks about the music and how it was just fantastic, so it would be really interesting to see a presentation brought to the world, where music isn't the main event, or music isn't going to be the biggest part of it- where really it's going to be the visual side of it. It would probably make for wonderful TV.

Lorelei: Well yeah, I think so and again that might be good for raising awareness because it would be something that everyone, even if you're just watching it on your TV at home or if you're watching it on YouTube on your computer, you can get involved with it, because those visuals are going to seem like they're directed at you because you're right in front of them.

Sabrina: Exactly! And how many athletes will be going there from Ireland?

Lorelei: Well there are still some qualifying tournaments to be held... at the moment, the Football Team, the Irish Deaf Men's Football Team has qualified for the competition, so that'll be 26 people

going over including managers and a physio. Then we have the Badminton and three Badminton players have been confirmed, they'll be going over , again with a manager and after the Irish National Open for swimming, we'll be able to confirm what swimmers are going, but it will those three that will be the specialities, sports-wise.

Sabrina: So they're the main Irish events: the Football, Badminton and Swimming, those are the ones to watch out for...and who would be the hot competition that Ireland would face?

Lorelei: Well, with the Men's Football- Since the 1980s, the Men's Football Team have been ranked in the top four in the world, but of course the other three from the top four in the world will also be in the competition. Their main competition would usually be: Germany, America and Russia. It was Germany that the qualifying match was against and it was a draw, so the Football Team will be working to improve even more so they can try to do even better.

Sabrina: They have pride to regain there don't they (laughs)? T's interesting to just look at the different rivalries that would occur within sport and really it's all the same isn't it?

Lorelei: Oh it really is, across the board.

Sabrina: So obviously one of the main things, with all of these things is the money. There has to be financial backing there for all of these things and money has to come from different sources and different places and like everything else, where does it come from?

Lorelei: Well, the funding comes from a number of places. We get a small amount of funding from the Irish Sports Council and the Football Association of Ireland and we've been supported and helped along the way by SwimIreland and BadmintonIreland, but that still leaves a lot of room for external funding. Now, we've applied for numerous grants and we have a lot of fundraising activities coming up so we're hoping that they'll all come together to get the money to send over the athletes, which of course can be quite expensive. When you total up the flights and the accommodation costs for the Badminton players, the swimmers and the Football Team, it comes to just short of €74,000.

Sabrina: So it's not a small figure?

Lorelei: No.

Sabrina: It's quite a significant amount of money that needs to be sourced.

Lorelei: Absolutely and t's particularly difficult in a country which, as you said earlier, isn't that aware that we have this Deaf Team and that we have the Deaflympics.

Sabrina: Yeah, I imagine most people only know about it because they have either a relative or a friend, or somebody that they know who is involved with it.

Lorelei: Yeah, they have a personal connection.

Sabrina: Yeah, it would be lovely to bet funding from them but that's not where all of the funding can come from.

Lorelei: yeah and the other trouble of course, is that we're in the middle of a recession and our main reach is our members and our members' friends and families and of course they are supporting us and a big thank you to them because they are really supporting us and being really helpful, but we

can't keep asking the same people who are, you know, under financial constraints themselves.

Sabrina: And if people would like to donate money, or get involved, or I don't know, maybe set up an event themselves that could raise money. How could they go about that?

Lorelei: Well that'd be brilliant, definitely all very welcome. I suppose the best way would either be to go onto our Facebook page, or you could check out: www.deafsportsireland.com, email iadmin@deafsportsireland.com, or call into the office in Deaf Village Ireland, just off the Nava Road, there would always be people in there that would be happy to talk about that possibility.

Sabrina: That's .located in the Deaf Village? I've never heard of this. Are there other centres there or is it just the one centre and you've just decided to call it the Deaf Village?

Lorelei: It was actually opened last year. It was officially launched last month but a number of organisations moved in last year into the new premises and what they've done is they've formed this centre- it's a state-of-the-art centre which provides educational, religious, sporting and community activities and services and there's a number of Deaf groups within it. There's also a citizen's Information in there and the Inspire Fitness Centre, so it's acting as a community centre as well, which is great because it's bringing the local hearing community and the Deaf community of Dublin together.

Sabrina: That's absolutely wonderful, I'd never even heard of such a place and it really sounds like the Mecca for Deaf athletes and even just the centre and the community which obviously provides such an array of services.

Lorelei: It's great because if somebody comes in enquiring about a particular service, they might be able to find out information about three or four things, rather than trekking around the country to go to different places to find out the information.

Sabrina: It's wonderful. Really wish we had more things like that here.

Lorelei: And everyone's always very welcome. We're open 9-5.30 Monday to Friday.

Sabrina: That's absolutely perfect and I think we're going to leave it there today folks, a huge thank you to Lorelei Fox-Roberts, the Communications and Fundraising Assistant with Deaf Sports Ireland.