Time for tea



Tea dances will be held around the country this month to mark Anzac Day and raise funds for the Royal British Legion. **Carole Edrich** finds out more

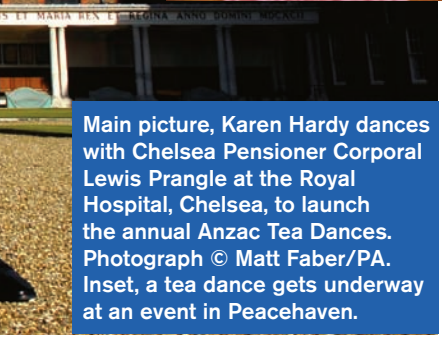
Two years ago the children of Oakland School in Windsor performed *Strictly Cinderella* as their Christmas play. Based on the story of Cinderella, they changed the ball into a "Strictly Come Dancing" affair in Windsor Castle, with King Chad and Queen Camilla trying to find a dancing partner for their son, the Prince. Everyone loved it: "What we noticed was that the children took on the personas of the real 'Strictly' personalities," explains headmistress Rosalin Sendorak. "They were so recognisable in their roles as the judges, Bruce Forsyth and the stars, it was very funny."

Already active in the arts and dance, when the school heard about Anzac Tea Dances they decided to get involved. The dances, sponsored by Anzac biscuits, are being organised across the country to help raise funds for the Royal British Legion and commemorate Anzac Day on April 25.

"We already support the Royal British Legion on Poppy Day so the tea dance seemed a natural thing to do," said Sandra Liang, a Year One teacher at the school who also leads Healthy Schools and PSHE Citizenship.







Main picture, Karen Hardy dances with Chelsea Pensioner Corporal Lewis Prangle at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea, to launch the annual Anzac Tea Dances. Photograph © Matt Faber/PA. Inset, a tea dance gets underway at an event in Peacehaven.

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"Some parents who do ballroom dancing have agreed to open the dance and we've been teaching the children waltz, cha cha and social foxtrot. We have parents who are catering too."

Oakland School are planning to use much more than the biscuits, tea, bunting and music provided in their Sponsors Pack. National flags from Australia and New Zealand will accompany the Union Jack on their walls, the dining hall will take on a 1940s theme with tiny Union Jack flags over white tablecloths, and traditional cakes and cucumber sandwiches will accompany the Anzac biscuits and tea.

"There are just under 200 kids in the school and we're hoping at least two-thirds of them will come. We're holding it on Friday April 24, the night before Anzac Day, and have also opened the tea dance up to parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles."

Mike Harfleet, spokesperson for Anzac Biscuits, explains how the idea evolved. "We have always given four per cent of our year-round revenue to the Royal British Legion, and about four years ago we started tea dances with a pilot scheme. This is the first year we decided to give the opportunity to schools and we set up a briefing document for teachers to involve the tea dance as part of the school curriculum. Our notes cover the history and geography, and participation helps develop social awareness, organisation and managerial skills. Last but not least there are fitness elements."

Tea dances grew in popularity during World War I, providing respite for British Servicemen and women on leave. Today, with popular shows like "Strictly Come Dancing" on television, dance is very much back on the agenda, and during the first three weeks of January 2009, over 80 schools signed up to take part in Anzac's campaign, more than doubling the number of dances held in 2008.

"Strictly" star Karen Hardy says, "Dancing is not only invigorating and great exercise, but it can bring generations together, so we are encouraging people across the country to get up on their feet and support this great cause." Dee Hall, regional head of fundraising for the Royal British Legion, explained that the school tea dances are in addition to around 30 other Anzac Day fundraising events. "The RBL distributes educational material to every school in the land. We're really pleased with the results because over 100 schools have already registered an interest and we're enthusiastic about working on something that, while educational, is also going to be enormous fun!" ●

Visit anzacteadance.com to register your event online or contact your local Royal British Legion fundraiser for further information at britishlegion.org.uk.