



Safe and secure

IT HAS been a privilege to have been High Sheriff of Tyne and Wear. It is a role that lets you knock on doors and see them open, so I do hope that, with all those who supported me, I have made a difference for others on this particular journey.

In my year I focussed on two areas. One, to recognise the work of all those involved in safeguarding children – complex and difficult work, which takes great sensitivity, resilience, and often finely balanced judgement. Two, to raise awareness of the plight of children and young people who live with domestic abuse.

I undertook three major initiatives:

- **Supported by the police and crime commissioner, the chief constable and Northumbria University, we held a conference called 'Hearing the voice of the child; creating safe spaces for children and young people affected by domestic abuse'. For the first time we focussed on the impact on children and young people in the North East and showcased good work happening in the region.**
- **A workshop to share how far domestic violence perpetrator programmes help rehabilitate the offender and thus reduce domestic abuse.**
- **The launch of the 'High Sheriff of Tyne and Wear's 50th Anniversary PhD scholarship', addressing a gap in current research to help answer the question 'when is home safe and secure?' Aimed at children, uniquely by listening to children. This will be delivered through a special partnership between Durham University and seven housing providers which have gifted funds for the research.**

Creating safe places is a cornerstone of the Tyne and Wear High Sheriff's Awards Fund from which hundreds of children and young people have benefited. We had



Above: Ruth Thompson with Kevin Ball, former Sunderland AFC captain and club ambassador, with the winning youngsters at the High Sheriff's Awards evening

a great High Sheriff's Awards evening at Sunderland University when over £30,000 was shared among more than 50 organisations, celebrating with around 150 youngsters.

My husband and I have been part of many special days. I have attended seven royal visits, each very different; watched the formality and the fun of civic events; been entertained by our armed forces and paid tribute to them at commemorative days, especially those marking 100 years since the outbreak of World War One.

It has been my pleasure to host, with a warm North-East welcome, a dozen dinners with High Court Judges who have generously reciprocated. I have sat in courts observing the legal system close up and I won't forget the formal, colourful processions at Durham, York and Newcastle Cathedrals, the pageantry marking the start and finish of the legal terms.

I have seen the operations of those who keep us safe and secure, the probation, prison, police, ambulance, and fire and rescue services, taking part in their awards' ceremonies which conferred well-deserved recognition of the wonderful service they give. I have seen in action the RNLI, which operates all day and every day, funded almost exclusively by public donations and run entirely by volunteers. I left humbled and proud in equal measure that here in Tyne and Wear we not only invented the lifeboat, but we also have in Sunderland the oldest operational lifeboat



Above: Ruth Thompson with Susan Winfield, Lord-Lieutenant of Tyne and Wear, and the county's civic heads

centre in the country and are pioneering work in sea safety.

It is often asked whether we still have a sense of community. I would say that community spirit is in full flow even if occasionally dashed against hard rocks in recent times. I have met extraordinary people working with our communities; I fear that the fabric of society would crumble without them. Martin Luther King, Jr said, 'Life's most persistent and urgent question is "What are you doing for others?"' If someone asked that question here in Tyne and Wear they would need to sit awhile to hear the answers.

◆ **Ruth Thompson OBE**
High Sheriff of Tyne and Wear 2014-15