



Back to basics

MICHAEL ROSEN wrote a wonderful children's book called *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* and as the family search for the bear, they go through all obstacles with the lovely words, 'We can't go over it, we can't go under it, Oh no, we've got to go through it!' My two-year-old grandson, Harry, loves the book. I sometimes feel that as High Sheriff, we can go through it and that's my inspiration for my theme for the year, literacy. In our region, there is clear evidence that disadvantaged children fall behind their classmates in reading and writing. If they arrive at primary school behind others in these skills, they often don't catch up all the way through school. They are inhibited when it comes to further and higher education for the simple reason that they haven't got basic skills to read and fill in forms. At the other end of the scale, some businesses often ignore

this lack of basic skill as they don't need it or they want to avoid embarrassing their employee. It means, however, that the parents don't have the skills themselves to take back to their children.

One of my strengths in business was connectivity and the ability to connect partners in all places and at all levels. Being High Sheriff is an ideal opportunity to do just that. I've spent the first few months just talking to a range of amazing people and organisations which do some fabulous work around literacy. I've been exploring the idea of bringing everyone together to find better solutions in partnership rather than individually. Schools North East was my first call representing schools across the region, but then came Live Theatre, Seven Stories (the National Centre for Children's Books), New Writing North, University of Sunderland, North East Chamber

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of Commerce and others. Finally, I contacted the Education Endowment Foundation, which is leading and funding a five-year £10 million North East Primary Literacy Campaign!

So what is the plan? Everyone says the idea is right and before I finish my year I plan to bring those organisations working in this area together alongside schools, colleges and businesses for one day to see if there are innovative ways of working that can change lives and help young people reach their potential. March 2017 also sees World Book Day and this should fit perfectly! It's a huge privilege to be the High Sheriff of Tyne and Wear for 2016-17 and if I can use the position to make just a small dent in this issue or change one life, the year will be special.

That's my theme, but beyond that everything – from making my Declaration at St Peter's Church (birthplace of the Venerable Bede) and reception in the National Glass Centre, both in Sunderland, to visits to Northumbria Police, Tyne and Wear Fire Service, Sea Cadets, community groups and many more – has been inspirational. So much so that in October I will walk 20 miles around the districts of Tyne and Wear to raise funds for the High Sheriff's Fund.

◆ John Mowbray OBE
High Sheriff of Tyne and Wear 2016-17



Photo by James Tolley

Top: Showing support for Sunderland as UK City of Culture 2021
Left: High Sheriff's Declaration at St Peter's Church, Sunderland – Harry thinks the cocked hat will help the bear hunt