

SOUTH YORKSHIRE

News from and about members



A revelatory experience

PRIOR TO taking up office as High Sheriff the only consistent advice I received was ‘do it your way’. But how was I to interpret this? Being from a legal background I suppose my initial instinct was to support those involved in delivering law and order, from judges through to the police and other agencies. So I embarked upon contacting the appropriate people and one of my first visits was to the custody suite in Sheffield with a tour and a detailed briefing on the impact of organised-crime groups in the county. I learned about the complex issues which require multi-agency involvement and strategies to divert young people away from criminal activity. The need to understand local communities to ensure they have appropriate support is crucial.

With the help of the South Yorkshire Community Foundation, I have been able to visit a number of projects and small charities. Meeting

these groups and the brilliant volunteers who run them has been an absolute highlight of my year so far. One example is the Jade project in Dinnington, which operates in one of the most deprived areas of our county but has done amazing work in connecting with young people who live in challenging circumstances. Many of the young people have either been expelled from school or run the risk of it and Jade has worked to restore their confidence and enabled a number to pass exams and then return to mainstream education. I saw similar successes at Onboard Skatepark in Sheffield – a project set up by Amy Cooper, using family money to establish the centre. It is both inspiring and humbling to meet such fabulous people. Their work is vital in our community.

On a different note, I have enjoyed attending a huge variety of events. These have been as diverse as attending the AGM of the County

Photo credit: Ian Spooner

Above: Armed Forces Day, with Sheffield Councillor Tony Damms, Commodore Philip Waterhouse RN and the Lord Mayor of Sheffield, Cllr Tony Downing



Scouts, presenting medals at the Invictus Trials and welcoming HRH the Duke of Sussex to the city. It was wonderful to watch him in action, taking time to speak to the competitors and families.

As a guest of Sheffield Hallam University I watched the ceremony to award an honorary degree to Albie Sachs, the South African judge and leading civil rights lawyer. What an inspirational person he is; it was a privilege to listen to his interview with Baroness (Helena) Kennedy QC.

Another experience has been – high temperatures! Attending Armed Forces Day in Rotherham in court dress in temperatures of around 30° C was a challenge. Some cadets fainted. Fortunately neither the mayor nor I did so dignity was maintained.

In conclusion, I reflect that this has been a revelatory experience. The access the role gives to so many different aspects of the workings of the county is remarkable. I can only hope that in some way my efforts to help have given some recognition to the incredible work in the third sector and that connecting people and organisations has made a worthwhile contribution.

I look forward to the coming months with, I must confess, a lot less trepidation than I did when I set out in the role.

◆ John Pickering

High Sheriff of South Yorkshire 2019-20



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Above: Presenting the gold medal to Dave Rose at the Invictus Games Trials with Dame Sarah Storey, Paralympic gold medalist

Left: Onboard Skatepark with Amy Cooper and her sister Jan