



Community involvement on a large scale

FOLLOWING MY Declaration ceremony at the University of South Wales in April 2019, I was prepared to make the most of the opportunity afforded to me during my year as High Sheriff to ensure that the people of Mid Glamorgan would come together and celebrate all that is great about living in this part of Wales.

The mission of the charity for youth homelessness, Llamau, struck a chord with me and provided an opportunity to make a difference – it's a frightening reality, and I felt I needed to balance positive life experiences with the sometimes negative reality.

Engaging with the Youth Mayor of Merthyr Tydfil and the Youth Forum, they discussed their desire to find a platform giving young people between the ages of 11 and 24 years the opportunity to raise funds for Llamau while also providing opportunities to further their careers and dreams in the performing arts – a winning combination. With the support of borough councils, schools, South Wales Police youth volunteers, St John Ambulance, the University of South Wales,

RIGHT: Programme designed by Roxanna Williams, a pupil at Ysgol Rhydywaun, and produced by Print shop USW

Below: Police youth volunteers who helped at the Musical Extravaganza

Below right: Simon Chalk violin/conductor, Geraint Hopkins pianist, Wynne Evans tenor and Rebecca Evans soprano, who helped judge the event soloists

the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, friends and colleagues, the High Sheriff's Musical Extravaganza was born. This project provided inspiration and community involvement on a large scale.

Assisted by a summer school sponsored by the university, the Musical Extravaganza enabled young people to develop their skills in the performing arts. Each council held their own event to select the finalists who were to perform at the Extravaganza – various age groups of solo vocalists, solo instrumentalists and choirs. Every finalist was invited to participate in two song-writing and recording sessions at the Acapela Studios in Cardiff with singer-songwriter Bronwen Lewis. Together they wrote and performed a beautiful song on homelessness, 'More to Me', recorded as a CD and sold to raise funds for Llamau. The CD also included a poem specially

written by Nick Jones and performed by the actor Michael Sheen.

Young people from schools competed to create the branding and the winning design was used for all materials, programmes and the CD. All young people involved were invited to the Musical Extravaganza staged at the Royal Welsh College in February, with tickets available to the public. It was a phenomenal event and the winning performance of each of the categories went on to have a masterclass to further explore their talents, followed by another recording session with a CD produced for their portfolio.

All participants involved in the event received a High Sheriff's certificate acknowledging their commitment and support, and even though Storm Dennis occurred on the same weekend it did not deter young people from making this a success. Sadly, due to travel disruption the choirs were not able to perform on the night, but they each received their finalist certificates. The judges (all Welsh international artists) performed on stage to open the show, thus providing vital confirmation that dreams do become reality. My sincere thanks go to the judges who were such an inspiration to the young people and to Andrea Byrne, ITV Wales host.

While I could have spoken about many events during my year as High Sheriff – overall a phenomenal and humbling experience I will never forget – the role is key to engaging communities and opening doors to enable people to love life and all that it brings.

**Colonel Tina Donnelly
CBE TD DL**

High Sheriff of Mid Glamorgan 2019-20

