



Ten days in prison

AS MY year as High Sheriff of Kent draws to a close, I have spent some time reflecting on the very unusual year that I have enjoyed. The fact that plans had to be abandoned and events cancelled is not a surprise to anyone but I think our cohort of 'Corona High Sheriffs' have managed to rise above the disappointments and made the very best of a difficult situation. The friendships that I have made with fellow High Sheriffs via Zoom and social media are very special and I hope will be long lived.

Before the year began, I was a little apprehensive about visiting prisons. However, I have been so enlightened by the connection that I have made with the governors of the seven Kent prisons and young offender institutions. Initially, the correspondence was via email and telephone. I had visits planned then postponed but never cancelled and am pleased to report that during my year I have spent ten days in prison (not something I thought I would be saying at the end of my shrieval year).

I was delighted to present High Sheriff's Awards to those residents who were put forward by their governors for being great examples to their fellow prisoners. Judging was difficult but we selected a wonderful group of recipients from each prison. I met all of them in person and was thrilled to see how much these awards meant to them. I hope it will spur them on in their quest for a better life and will help to support their applications for work on release.

The prisons in Kent range from the YOI in Rochester housing just 100 'children', who have a strict daily routine, to the two Category B prisons on the Isle of Sheppey, where there are over a thousand residents in each and where for the best part of this year, they have been locked in their cells 23 hours of the day. There is also a women's open prison at East Sutton Park which houses around 100 residents. This prison has extensive grounds and a farm where many of them work, often becoming inspired to care for the environment. One of the awards that I presented was to a lady in recognition of her work clearing overgrown areas by hand, thus enhancing wildlife and providing a tranquil haven for staff and residents to enjoy away from the daily stresses of prison life.

There is no doubt that rehabilitation and hope for a new start is what the prison staff want for all those who are receptive and willing to try to change. Reoffending carries high social and economic costs, thus reducing its risk is also a high priority for government. Resettlement is the key linchpin for reducing reoffending. Though everyone involved is trying their hardest to make this process as smooth as possible, I have seen how hard this can be and how much we still need to do as a county to help get previous offenders work and give them the best chance of starting a new life without crime.

One of the most pleasurable aspects of the year has been visiting charities and voluntary groups which have been so struck by the pandemic and yet have shown



With Natasha Wilson, governor at HMP/YOI East Sutton Park



Presentation to Rubicon Cares, a charity offering counselling to victims of crime: Jackie Threlfall, Sandie Turner, founder, Kerry Turner, Sinead Sheridan

resourcefulness and enterprise to overcome the difficulties. I was delighted to have the support from the Kent Community Foundation to present awards and cheques to those charities that I felt had really gone the extra mile. We were unable to hold a formal ceremony to give the awards; instead I went to visit the charities for a second time with my daughter Alex and we presented the certificates and took photographs at each place. This was a very intimate and special thing to do – I think the recipients were thrilled.

◆ Remony Millwater
High Sheriff of Kent 2020-21



Rising Sun domestic abuse charity, with recipient and CEO, Frances Ellis



Challenger Troop – recipient and founder of charity is Major Simon Dean



Dogs Trust Freedom Project – Kent project leader Martha Huntley