



Dear diary...

DIARY ENTRY, 31 March, 2021: 'At last, after 3½ years of nervous anticipation, I made my Declaration as High Sheriff of Northamptonshire 2021/22'.

Despite initial COVID restrictions I have visited many wonderful organisations. The generosity and kindness of people is truly humbling and the pandemic has really inspired some extraordinary acts of kindness.

My primary focus has been on young people who have been so disadvantaged during the pandemic. Many of the Emergency Services Cadets come from difficult backgrounds; the ESC enable them to learn teamwork and significant skills. Many go on to make careers in their chosen course. COVID curtailed all training and the High Sheriff's police cadet for 2020, Alfie Kingston, was unable to attend any ceremonies last year so we decided to award him another year. I was delighted to meet Alfie, his family and some of his cohort. During the summer, a number of them walked to our house to gain some D of E



Tea in the garden with the Emergency Services Cadets



Visit to East Midlands Ambulance Service



Above: Attending an event celebrating the 50th anniversary of Bangladeshi Independence at University of Northampton with Rufia Ashraf, first Bangladeshi female mayor of Northampton

credits, finishing with a barbecue tea in the garden. Our two dogs provided the entertainment, to the extent that we had to keep a sharp eye out in case they found their way on to the homeward-bound bus.

Young people with learning disabilities have particularly suffered during the pandemic. My husband Hugh and I have visited day-care centres around the county where people have moved heaven and earth to help their young people have fun as well as learn valuable skills so that they can achieve independence and some kind of meaningful employment. My first job was to attend the launch of a café where



Visit to Mower's Ark, Corby, a centre for young adults with learning disabilities



Kettering Food Bank and 'angels in human form'

young people can learn working skills in a commercial environment.

Unfortunately the pandemic has exacerbated inequality in the county and food banks have become more important than ever. We have been constantly amazed by the selflessness of those who give their time and energy to help others, accessing donations from supermarkets, Fare Share and generous local small businesses who contribute time, skills and materials. These enterprises have created self-financing food clubs, launched cooking classes and provided children with a square meal during the school holidays.

Northamptonshire has a very diverse population and I have attended interfaith events to promote unity and tolerance. We have raised flags for National Windrush Day and Bangladeshi Freedom 50, celebrating 50 years of independence, and attended Eid in the Park with around 2,000 of the Muslim community. Flags were raised again for Armed Services Day and Emergency Services Day and I have been able to visit RAF bases at both ends of the county.

All this and much more in six months! The High Sheriff's role is a busy one and being a lady High Sheriff has been a great challenge to my organisational skills. However, I feel honoured to have had the opportunity to find out about the amazing things taking place in Northamptonshire.

◆ Amanda Lowther DL
High Sheriff of Northamptonshire 2021-22