



Who wants to visit America?

THE THEN Chief Constable of Norfolk gave me an excellent challenge for my year of office – ‘We know where 50 per cent of crime will be in Norfolk in 10 years’ time. If it is predictable, why isn’t it preventable?’

To try to answer this challenge I visited schools and colleges; youth organisations; police and prisons; magistrates’ and Crown courts; a youth court and the youth offending team... and everywhere I asked them that same question. How can we stop the cycle of offending?

TIP – I recommend all High Sheriffs watch a five-minute cartoon on ACEs. Put ‘Adverse Childhood Experiences Cartoon’ into Google (Public Health Cymru) – it explains more than most learned papers that I have read and will inform your year on the causes of crime.

Sadly, all too many children and young people are told they are failures throughout their school life and we should not then be surprised if they join county lines gangs. Almost every primary teacher can tell you which children will end up eventually being excluded or falling out of school.



The High Sheriff’s reception was held on Cromer Pier



Remembrance Sunday in Great Yarmouth



Visiting Norwich Primary Academy and planting a tree for The Queen’s Green Canopy

Every child has talents and these need to be celebrated and built on. We must also be better at vocational training.

What can we as High Sheriffs do about it? For a start we can highlight the issue in our counties, championing early family support in disadvantaged communities to reduce ACEs; extra safeguarding support in schools; encourage youth groups and clubs of every sort. The St Giles Trust (stgilestrust.org.uk) does an outstanding job in training teachers and parents about drugs and gangs. The police safer schools team are welcomed by most principals and can be a real force for good, not least breaking down stereotypical barriers.

TIP – When visiting schools or young people ask them how many want to go to America (or Australia) during their lifetime? Most will put up their hands. Then tell them that if they get a police record, however small, they will never get a visa. It is effective, relevant deterrence.

The High Sheriff can play a valuable role in linking schools with their communities – links that in many cases have broken down because of the pandemic. You can organise meetings of different local youth and volunteer groups with the local school when you visit a town or ward and also challenge local leaders about facilities for the young. Have they asked the young what they want?

Another area I found valuable was to challenge principals on both exclusion and home schooling. Far too many children have still not returned full-time to school yet school is the safest place for



Visiting the Swan Youth Project in Downham Market which supports young people aged between 8 and 18

them. I found alternative provision was highly variable ranging from the good to the very poor – ask prison governors when you visit how many of their prisoners were excluded from school. **TIP – Restorative Justice works. I have seen it in practice in a junior school and in youth work. We should be encouraging more of it.**

Getting a good job helps prevent crime. The High Sheriff can encourage organisations to work together to get more work experience; more jobs fairs; encourage apprenticeships and build on the excellent Timpson initiative of Employer Advisory Boards in prisons.

You can make a difference just by asking the right questions, by celebrating and promoting those who are doing good and challenging accepted thinking.

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High Sheriff of Norfolk 2021-22