



Connecting communities

JUST BEFORE the end of March, dressed in a long black coat with steel cut buttons and frills, a hat with a sculpted burnt ostrich feather and a sword, I found myself making a solemn declaration to ‘truly serve The Queen’s Majesty in the Office of High Sheriff of the county of Leicestershire’.

Little did any of us know that six months later we would be standing before our counties, reading the Proclamation, and saying the words ‘God Save The King’. Shock, sadness, honour and duty were my overriding emotions. With little time to process the news, everyone came together to honour the life of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and prepare for our King.

This solemn historical moment eclipsed the whirlwind six months spent engaging with the community from all corners of the county, shining a light on some incredible charities, including Help The Homeless, LOROS (a local hospice), Jamilah’s Legacy (a voluntary mental health initiative), to name a few; visiting police headquarters; spending a day on the beat; and sitting in on a murder trial.

‘Connecting Communities’ has been my theme. After a long period of life in a bubble, my aim was to bring people from the diverse communities of Leicester and Leicestershire together in different ways.

As Ramadan began within a few days of taking office, a *Celebration of Fasting* seemed a fitting way to bring people together and was an initiative supported by our Director of Public Health; people were encouraged to give something up for the day on 20 April (food, TV, social media, sugar, or go nil by mouth).



Breaking of the fast at St Philip’s Church, Leicester

Members of the secular and non-secular community from Leicestershire fasted from sunrise to sunset, as did friends, family, and others internationally who picked up what we were doing from social media. Locally, members of the diverse Leicestershire community celebrated the breaking of the fast at St Philip’s Church, the Muslim call to prayer bouncing beautifully from the church walls, echoed by the call from the mosque across the road as the sun set.

In July, 60 people from the county walked 10 miles across Bosworth Battlefield with historian Professor Kevin Schurer and expert Richard Mackinder raising funds for charity.

In September, a *Charity Cricket Match, Community Festival, Bake Off and Awards Evening* was organised ‘by the community for the community’ in collaboration with Leicestershire County Cricket Club. Twenty-four people played cricket at Grace Road, including the Bishop of Loughborough, the former PCC, and representatives from three universities,



At my Declaration with Police Cadets Phillip Scarborough and Anna Barnes, flanked by junior consorts Evony Higgins and Zaara Moosa



With members of the winning charity cricket team



Charity walk across Bosworth Battlefield

charities, local schools, cricket clubs, police, the BBC, etc.

At the celebration of *Unsung Heroes in the Community*, awards and certificates were presented to individuals nominated by the community for making a difference in the areas of Law and Order, Education, Charity, Disability, Women and Girls, Children and Young People, Health and Sport. It was a privilege to meet so many people doing incredible work. One winner said, ‘I have been doing this work for 25 years and never before have I had an award for the work that I do.’

So far £23,500 has been raised to support four charities all of which work with children: Warning Zone (keeping children safe from the perils of the digital and physical world), STEPS (conductive education for children with brain injuries), Healing Little Hearts (babies with heart defects), and Leicestershire County Cricket Club Foundation (cricket for underprivileged children).

It has been wonderful to have the support of Police Cadets Phillip Scarborough and Anna Barnes; consorts Vijay Sharma, Krishna Kotecha, Diana Esho; junior consorts Evony Higgins (14) and Zaara Moosa (13); the Very Revd David Monteith, my Chaplain; and Helen Johnson, my Under Sheriff.

Mehmooda Duke MBE DL
High Sheriff of Leicestershire 2022-23