



# Two little words

**SOMETIMES EVEN the best laid plans go wrong, and so it was that I found myself testing positive for Covid two days before the sad death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, unable to take part in the important Proclamation ceremony for my county.**

That role went to my Under Sheriff, David Barraclough, graciously supported by my Lord-Lieutenant, Ed Anderson CBE, and I could only watch events unfold via the BBC! However, I was still able to take part remotely in various county meetings as the London Bridge plans were implemented, and I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all of the local authorities in West Yorkshire for the way they worked tirelessly, bringing together all the disparate council and emergency services to ensure everything ran smoothly throughout the mourning period. It was wonderful to see so many different communities coming together and the deep sadness I felt was tinged with enormous pride at being a part of this great nation.

As I look back over the start of my year, my Declaration ceremony already seems an age ago. However, the preparations for my shrieval year had begun some two months earlier when,

with the encouragement and support of my predecessor, Clive Lloyd, I started introducing myself to a number of civic dignitaries whose help I hoped I might receive during my year of office.

While I knew many interesting invitations to a wide variety of events would come my way, I wanted my focus for the year to be on supporting small grassroots community groups, particularly those working with young people at risk of becoming involved in drugs, gangs and crime.

The variety of ways in which these organisations deal with the young people they are trying to help has impressed me greatly. West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service has a number of youth intervention programmes and works with The Prince's Trust to implement them. Project Challenge in Halifax provides alternative education for young people aged 16 to 19 who have long dropped out of formal education. CATCH in Harehills, a deprived inner city area of Leeds, has a youth community hub designed, built and run by the young people themselves, who are the volunteers, with minimal supervision from adults. These are only three of the organisations I have visited, but their aims are the same:



With young volunteers at CATCH (Community Action to Create Hope) in Harehills, Leeds



With the staff at Project Challenge, Halifax: Tom Harnett, Kate Brander, Lorna Butterick (Business Manager), Stacey Wood, Georgia Frampton, and Kate Tavana



On a visit to West Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service with Annabel Pugh and Claire Wright, Youth Intervention and Prince's Trust Manager

to help disadvantaged young people build their self-esteem and self-confidence, to take on responsibility and to learn skills which will help them in the future.

Many of the groups rely on volunteers for their survival and I have already met a number of ordinary people doing extraordinary things within their communities. They do not seek recognition or reward, but believe passionately in what they are doing.

It has been heartwarming to be welcomed by each of the groups I have contacted, all of whom are delighted that a High Sheriff has taken an interest in their work. Having been a volunteer myself, I know how much it means when somebody notices you and says 'thank you'. It has been an opportunity to present High Sheriff's certificates to individuals who deserve special merit and I have learned never to underestimate the importance of those two little words.

**◆ Susan Baker MBE JP DL**  
*High Sheriff of West Yorkshire 2022-23*