

'Opportuneering'

Selina Graham

Hon Mrs Graham, High Sheriff
of Shropshire 2022-23

One of the two most eye-opening visits for me this year was to Willowdene, a pioneering women's rehabilitation centre, where I was honoured to hand out achievement certificates to some of the graduates – they had all been in prison, but when you listened to their stories, you realise that we may well have ended up there too given their circumstances. They were products of their society – our society – and really we put them there.

The second visit was to HM Prison Long Lartin, a Category A prison for the very worst offenders, and it was the most depressing, oppressively hopeless place I have ever been in. I asked the governor of the prison what he would change if he could and he said without hesitation 'to have glass walls'. He would like us all to be reminded of what is behind those walls, as a lesson about what happens when things go wrong, really wrong with society – our society – and to question whether we could have prevented them ending up there?

My point I suppose is the importance of collective responsibility, and that together we can and need to make a difference.

I have met so many wonderful people who go the extra mile – be they paid or unpaid – and without exception I have been impressed by the people I have met, by the work that they do, the people whose lives they change, and the communities they help to create.



At Willowdene with graduates of the residential rehabilitation programme and CEO Dr Matthew Home

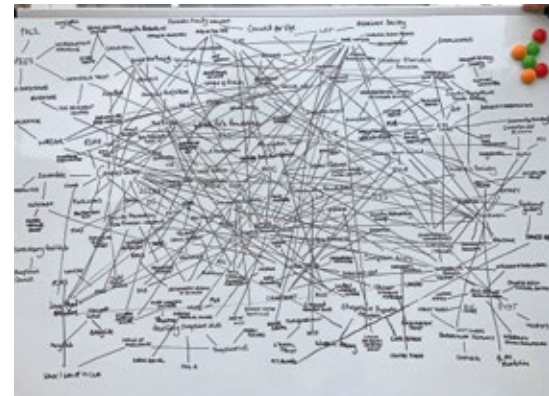


At Telford College for the High Sheriff's Outstanding Young Citizen of the Year Awards

Photo: Telford College

The power of the High Sheriff to enhance this work is unique and immeasurable. The power of those two words 'Thank You' and the importance of recognising what people do to help others (23 High Sheriff's Awards and 53 Outstanding Young Citizens Awards, including award winners in the High Sheriff's Legal Service); the power of collaboration – connecting two or more people or organisations so that they can learn from each other, reach more people, and have a greater impact; the power to reach wide audiences and encourage more people to step up in their community; the power of listening and sharing knowledge and advice gleaned from others. Most of all, for me, the power of the overview – so many people doing amazing things are working in silos; they are so busy doing what they do that they don't step back and consider it, let alone look at it in the context of what others are doing in the county. It has been a huge privilege and pleasure to share some of this context and hopefully, in a myriad of small ways, to have strengthened the impact that some of the kindest and most wonderful people in our county are having on others.

Social media is an incredibly valuable weapon both to showcase and thank, but also to share knowledge. I instigated the High Sheriff Asks campaign (which I am delighted that Mandy Thorn, my successor, intends to continue in some form) to encourage more volunteers by showcasing the variety (there is something for everyone), and make it



A busy year connecting and convening – together we are stronger

clearer what the 'ask' is – what attributes are needed and for how much time, how flexibly that time can be offered.

I have also invented a word! 'Opportuneering'! 'Volunteering' doesn't quite strike the right note, excite young people, or describe the wider benefits – it is the cure for so many of today's problems in society – whether simply because it releases endorphins to make you happy, or because it combats negative thoughts by making you feel good about yourself, or specific issues like stress, or anxiety, by giving access to new skills, new friends and new confidence. 'Opportuneering' is accessing the opportunities that are opened up by helping others. In terms of fulfilment, High Sheriffs are the ultimate 'opportuneers' and I look forward to the day that it is in the Oxford English Dictionary!