

Barely scratched the surface

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High Sheriff of West Yorkshire 2022-23

I don't know how I can compress my extraordinary year of office into a short article. Concisely, of course, is the answer! But concisely cannot possibly do justice to all the wonderful experiences I have had, the people I have met or the places I have visited across the county.

From the joyous events of Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee, celebrating an unparalleled lifetime of service to the nation, to her sad passing only a few months later and the Proclamation of the Accession of the new King.

I knew a year would not be all that long and I had decided from the outset to narrow my focus and concentrate on small voluntary groups working with vulnerable young people at risk of being drawn into crime. I have spent much of my year visiting them to find out the impressive work they do but realise I have barely scratched the surface of all these groups who contribute so much to this county; and that is without even taking into account others providing essential services such as food banks, health charities, etc. – the list is endless!

I have been struck by the fact that all these groups are classed as 'The Third Sector' and yet they are the first place many turn to in this cost-of-living crisis. It is their ability to adapt so quickly to the changing needs of the community that makes their work so vital.

In order to help me identify which groups fitted my criteria, I used the contacts I had made at the local authorities, the police, the emergency services and the



At my High Sheriff's Awards event held at Walker Morris LLP with the winning groups (CATCH; e:merge; iSpace5; Kumon Y'all; Project Challenge; The Zone). Also attending: Kate Hainsworth (CEO, Leeds Community Foundation), Ed Anderson CBE (Lord-Lieutenant), John Robins QPM DL (Chief Constable), Chris Brown OBE DL (2016-17), Zulfi Karim (in nomination 2023-24), Richard Jackson MBE DL (2018-19), David Barraclough (Under Sheriff) and Sue Harris (Senior Director, Walker Morris)

community foundations. If, during my visit, it became apparent that a particular member of staff or volunteer had made an outstanding contribution, I later returned to present them with a framed High Sheriff's certificate. This was always met with great delight and appreciation from the organisation itself as well as the recipient and all were keen to have a photo taken of the event! Despite my initial reservations about using Twitter and social media, posting these photos did help to publicise and promote the organisations, as well as my visits during the year.

There have been so many highlights for me and so many interesting invitations that I am struggling to pick out just a few to mention. One particularly personal event was to be asked as High Sheriff to open the new Citizens Advice office in Leeds, where I have been a volunteer for the past 45 years.

For me, however, the greatest highlight of the year has been meeting people from so many different communities across this wonderfully diverse county, learning about their work and being able to thank them for all they do; those who have little themselves yet do so much for the community around them; those involved in the hospices, the universities, the prisons, the police and other emergency services – fire and rescue, ambulance and air ambulance. The impact they make is significant, but often little recognised and I have sought throughout my year to use my position as High Sheriff to acknowledge their contribution.

It has been an absolute honour and privilege to serve the County of West Yorkshire. I have made many new contacts and friends along the way, in particular my successor, Zulfi Karim DL. I wish him every success for his year ahead.



Left: At the official opening of the new Citizens Advice Leeds office with Chief Executive Dianne Lyons

Right: With Holocaust survivors, Liesel Carter, Arek Hersh MBE, Jean Hersh and Dr Martin Capel (seated) at a Holocaust Survivors' Friendship Association event

