

# Mental health and wellbeing

## Professor Jean White CBE

High Sheriff of Mid Glamorgan 2023-24

I am very grateful to have been given the opportunity to serve the people of the County of Mid Glamorgan. The impact of the high cost of living and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to take its toll of the health and wellbeing of the population. I decided, therefore, to adopt the theme of mental health and wellbeing for my year in office and have Cwm Taf Morgannwg MIND mental health charity as my nominated charity. Having this focus has proven very helpful because I have been able to prioritise visits to charities, voluntary organisations and support groups which help people with mental health problems and conditions like dementia. It has also meant that when visiting homelessness shelters, HMP Parc Prison, police, probation, and court services, I have used the theme as a focus in discussions, because people who have contact with these services frequently have mental health or addiction issues.

Within the first month of being in post I had the privilege of attending two royal visits to the county. The first was by Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal, who visited the maternity services at Prince Charles Hospital, Merthyr Tydfil, and the second visit was by Their Royal Highnesses The Prince and Princess of Wales who visited Aberfan. The latter visit was very moving as it reinforced the relationship between the royal family and this small ex-mining community. Their visit reflected on that disastrous day in 1966 when 144 people died including 116 children from Pantglas Primary School due to the massive slip of coal waste which covered the school and surrounding houses. The royal couple were escorted by two child survivors (both past High Sheriffs), and met Mair Morgan, one of the teachers, and remaining members of the Wives of Aberfan group. They were visibly affected by the harrowing stories of that day's event, as is everyone who visits the cemetery and memorial garden. Much has

The Probation Service marked 50 years of unpaid community work placements by 'touring' their golden shovel



With members of the Merthyr Valley Veterans group



With Cllr Heather Griffiths, Bridgend Deputy Mayor, opening the refurbished Dementia Hub, a community facility in the heart of Bridgend Town looked after by Mental Health Matters Wales

been done to support this community, but the events of the past are still felt today.

I have had many opportunities to recognise the service and sacrifice of our armed forces. I enjoyed meeting veterans' groups in Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil and Porthcawl where members explained the importance of being with others who had served and having opportunities to engage in activities. It was fun acting as backing singer for the Guitars for Veterans group organised by Mental Health Matters Wales. The needs of veterans were much in evidence when I visited HMP Parc Prison, which has a dedicated wing for veterans in custody. There were insignia and other military artifacts decorating the walls and I got a sense of a community when I spoke to some of the prisoners.

I attended two important memorial events in June. Aberdare celebrated 100 years of their cenotaph. It was very poignant

hearing the names of those men from this parish who had died read out by students and cadets. I was honoured to place a wreath at the Falklands War Memorial in Pontypridd, marking 41 years since the war and the loss of lives and serious injuries of those present on the ship, *Sir Galahad* – many of whom were Welsh Guards. Armed Forces week involved flag raising ceremonies and parades, and, importantly the signing of the Armed Forces Covenant by public services and businesses, hosted by Bridgend County Borough Council.

The first six months have flown by, and I have many treasured memories of the people I've met. I am looking forward to my fundraising concert in October for my nominated charity in my hometown of Pen-coed, which will feature a male voice choir – well, it is Wales after all!



At the first ever Armed Forces Day parade in Bridgend Town with Peter Vaughan QPM (Lord-Lieutenant) taking the salute



Attending a South Wales Police PCSO passing out event