

Children 'Getting Court'

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High Sheriff of Gloucestershire 2023-24

Some High Sheriffs keep detailed records of every visit. Others record every mile covered and every tweet posted. They are at an enormous advantage over me – I who have done none of these things – because they have a wealth of information to draw on when it comes to describing their year.

Everybody warned me that the year would fly by with astonishing rapidity and it has. A remarkable number of people ask me whether I am enjoying 'my year' and, of course, I am. Kind of them to ask but... surely completely irrelevant? I have met remarkable people and been to places I would never have had access to without the entry badge of being High Sheriff. I have also been staggered by the scale and the generosity of the charitable and voluntary sectors in the county. But I strongly suspect that all High Sheriffs say the same, so I want to concentrate on two aspects of what goes on in Gloucestershire which I think are unusual.

A previous High Sheriff introduced a way of getting schoolchildren into our Crown Court in Gloucester, imaginatively called 'Getting Court'. The children come



With Cllr Jaro Kubaszczyk on Polish Heritage Day in Kings Square, Gloucester

with a teacher and sit in on a Friday morning court session. About halfway through the morning the judge clears the courtroom and calls the children forward so they are sitting where they have just seen the barristers performing and has

a conversation with them. They do this with amazing humanity, understanding and humour. There is then a brief address from an ex-prisoner – who now has turned their life around – giving an insider's view of life in prison. It is an eye-opening and personal account, which cannot fail to move anyone who hears it. I suggest that this type of crime prevention is enormously valuable and is naturally increasingly vulnerable to spending cuts. But the cost of 'Getting Court' for an entire year is paid for if it stops one young person being in a young offender institution for six weeks. It is, I would suggest, a scheme which could benefit from being more widely adopted.

One of my introductions in the course of this year has been what we have called a 'High Sheriff's Round Table' – a discussion with local leaders of industry about getting better value for their CSR budgets. In conjunction with our Community Foundation there seems to be

some scope for mutual benefit, whereby the costs of achieving an industry's corporate objectives are reduced by an existing process, about which all too often they know little. As I approach the end of my year, I very much hope that my successors will continue with this project.



An inspiring visit to The Butterfly Garden (a project for people of all ages dealing with disablement of any kind) to discover all the wonderful work that Chris Evans (centre) and others are doing



On a visit to see IT Schools Africa (now ITSA Digital Trust) and all the wonderful work they are doing in recycling tired computers and making use of them in Africa and in Gloucestershire