

# Connecting, community: young and old

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High Sheriff of Warwickshire 2023-24

In this virtual age, connecting young and old in our communities is increasingly important. Initiatives that bring the two together in almost any activity usually create respect and understanding between young and old alike.

I have seen that connection being made to work by volunteers throughout my year as High Sheriff in many of the locations that I visited: a boxing club, a dementia choir, a planting programme, the 'bicycle bus', or the brand-new fishing charity Reel Rod Squad with their motto 'Pick up a rod not a knife', inspired by the astonishing *Knife Angel* sculpture that we had in Nuneaton for the month of June.

Early in my year, the idea of launching a 'Young High Sheriff for a Day' competition was suggested. The aim was to engage young people aged between 14 to 18 years old with the role of the High Sheriff. The entrants were required to submit an essay or a video on why they would make a good Young High Sheriff for a day. I enjoyed all the varied entrants' enthusiastic ideas, but thankfully we had independent judges to select the winner, so it was not my responsibility to make that hard decision.

At a ceremony held in the Old Shire Hall in Warwick, beneath the High Sheriff's javelins that adorn the walls, the finalists were celebrated surrounded by their families and staff from Myton School – a gathering of over 150 people, with local media present. After some of the best entries were highlighted and the runners-up congratulated, Aaron Dhesi was robed (in a robe created by outfitters Michaels Civic Robes) as the winner and the first ever Young High Sheriff.

The Old Shire Hall was designed by Sanderson Miller and was the Warwick Justice Centre until 2012. Everyone who came to the ceremony also visited the courts, the cells and the dungeons, which gave the whole event a suitable gravitas.

'The motivation behind my aspiration to be High Sheriff for a day is a blend of historical fascination, a commitment to community service and a strong and lasting appreciation for the importance of the role,' said Aaron Dhesi. As Warwickshire's 'Young High Sheriff' Aaron accompanied me on several charity visits and supported me at the citizenship ceremony.



With Aaron Dhesi, Young High Sheriff for a Day, at the citizenship ceremony

An unexpected outcome came from the finalists themselves. Inspired by the High Sheriff's role as The King's representative for law and order, they set up sessions to discuss crime issues that concerned them in their school. From their discussions they produced an initiative to tackle bicycle vandalism, which they presented to Crimebeat. Myton School council hopes to now implement the project.

I also set out to shine a light on services around dementia, not least because this increasingly affects young and old in so many ways. As our population ages, this devastating diagnosis is upending lives for ever-increasing numbers of families.

Through many meetings and formal visits, I have had the pleasure to meet and formally thank the many people who



Planting oaks with the Woodland Trust



With volunteers at VASA, a charity in south Warwickshire connecting people through community transport and activities



The *Knife Angel* in Nuneaton with the Police Cadets



The Rod Squad motto

work and volunteer in our community health services. This included day centres, singing and dancing groups, nurses, carers' support groups, care homes and all the services that try to link families with the support they need.

I have been the 689th High Sheriff of Warwickshire. To highlight the scale of that timeline (an extension to the theme of connecting the young and the old), I endeavoured to personally plant a sapling in Warwickshire for each High Sheriff before me. I have failed. I have only managed 443! So, Sir Edward Boughton of Lawford Hall, Rugby (1778) will have to wait until this autumn, when I intend to plant the last 245. I hope some will become mighty oaks for future generations.

It has been an honour and a privilege to serve as High Sheriff of Warwickshire and I would like to thank all those who have supported me in my year. I wish my successor Raji Gill a wonderful year in office.