



With Ability Dogs 4 Young People, an Isle of Wight charity (started April 2012) training assistance dogs to enhance the independence of young people and children living with disabilities on the Isle of Wight

Inspiring connections for young people

Jacqueline Gazzard

High Sheriff Isle of Wight 2025/2026

'What is a High Sheriff... what do you do?' These are the questions I'm asked most often and when answering I can talk of the honour of representing law and order in my county and how I get to see the real lives and great community spirit of my home, the Isle of Wight. But how can I explain to a modern teenager the ways in which this role might make a difference? After all, we wear strange Georgian-inspired outfits with ostrich feathers and ancient lace. Here on our Island, this is enhanced by the loan of eighteenth-century crystal buckles, a First World War cloak and a unique badge of office recently created but inspired by an old Island crest.

My answer is wrapped into my aims for the year. I set out wanting to make inspiring connections for young people as they look to explore their talents and find careers that match their aspirations. There is too frequently a dearth of good information on the range of roles that can come from a love of different subjects. A drop-in for students who love history saw more than fifty young people from schools across the Island sit with archaeologists, curators, conservation scientists and archivists, as well as those interested in interpretation, heritage communications and even law – all of them sharing a love



GCSE students enjoyed a drop-in session exploring careers that can follow a love of history and heritage. It was organised with the Historical Association Isle of Wight branch. Here they are discussing 'conservation' and 'curating' with Christopher Warleigh-Lack from English Heritage

of history and keen to see what careers can fall out of that. I am now looking to stretch this to cover other subjects and (fingers crossed) develop a YouTube channel through a team of media students, who can create a bank of short clips and information on careers that come from every subject to inspire even more to go and find that elusive job for life. It will

clearly extend beyond my year in office, but has already given me a great sense of serving a community of young people we assume lack ambition, but instead often lack access to knowledge and inspiration.

Out of this project I am also working with a different community of Islanders focussed on mental health and addiction, as we look to try and create a pilot scheme to support offenders and families who suffer the consequences of petty crime due to addiction. It's a complicated brief and yet again something that will take time and many minds to make work, but as a magistrate I do hope it will make a difference if we get the green light to proceed. I already know this is the year to make connections and the real work will likely stretch beyond my twelve months.

So, what do I do? In truth, whatever I expected, this role has been so much more than I thought it would be. I was told by a veteran Islander that for one year I'd have extraordinary access and opportunity, before becoming entirely irrelevant the following April! I am sure he is quite right; he has certainly known a number of High Sheriffs in his time. I've seen and learnt more than I ever thought possible and I've a good few months to go. It is often busy and sometimes exhausting, but there is also such great joy in being able to celebrate all that we do as a small, but mighty, Island county.