

High Sheriff's Award Ceremony Speech 2022 - 2023

Ladies and Gentlemen and distinguished guests,

Welcome to The High Sheriff of Bedfordshire Awards 2022-23!

These awards have not been given out for a couple of years due to Covid, so it is particularly special for us to be able to hold this event. We have chosen to hold it here in Millbrook as it is not only about as central as we could make it in the county, but it is also our cosy, local village hall.

What an extraordinarily wonderful county we have, over my year as High Sheriff I have been surprised, impressed, and often moved by the sheer number of volunteers and people who work tirelessly and selflessly for the common good of their community, with little or no remuneration.

As I come to the end of my shrieval year, it seems appropriate to end it by giving out the High Sheriff Awards to the pick of those volunteers. It is the high point of my year to have the opportunity to say thank you to just a few of you. A couple of nominees this evening were so surprised to be nominated for any awards, they thought it was a hoax! This is typical of the modesty of those selected.

I am also giving out High Sheriff Certificates tonight. These are given out by High Sheriffs in all the Counties of England and Wales and they are awarded in recognition of great and valuable services to the community. In so doing, they even state that they 'recognise the appreciation of the residents and people of the County for activity and contribution in enhancing the life of the community'.

Without further ado, I will hand over to Pandora for the nominations:

Hello and good evening to you all!

Just to explain how it is going to work.

There are 3 Award Categories: Young Person, Adult and Group, and within these categories there are 3 awards, 1 for each of the areas of Bedfordshire: North Bedfordshire including Bedford, Central Bedfordshire and South Bedfordshire including Luton. We will read out the citations and then ask the recipients to come up and receive their awards.

Young Person Award for North Bedfordshire:

These two bright and brilliant young girls - just 14 years old - have raised £2000 in 2022 alone, to provide disadvantaged women with sanitary products, pain killers, clothes and hot meals and to help purchase school/educational necessities such as books, stationery and bags for disadvantaged kids.

They volunteer every Sunday morning for the charity, *Caring for Humanity*, to help plan and execute upcoming fundraisers. Najmin, a trustee of Caring for Humanity, their nominator says: 'They have worked tremendously hard with the planning, marketing and organisation of these events. In 2023 they plan to complete more fundraisers such as bake sales, book sales, tombola etcetera in various schools. They are an asset to the community and most importantly to the charity, and are a wonderful example for young teenagers like themselves.'

To recognise their selflessness and dedication to charitable work this award is given jointly to **Naima Khanom and Emma Chamberlain.**

Young Person Award for Central Bedfordshire:

There was tough competition for this award so in the end the High Sheriff decided to award a High Sheriff Certificate to the **Runner Up**.

This certificate is for an inspirational young person who has overcome many challenges herself and as a result wanted to give back to young people.

She has been volunteering as a young leader for a year with Central Bedfordshire Youth Voice, supporting Central Bedfordshire Youth Parliament. During this time she has supported young people with their campaigns on Domestic Abuse, Homelessness and Protecting the Environment.

She has supported young people with communication, teamwork and leadership skills; developed relationships with young people based on respect and trust; and ensured they have a safe place to develop their identity and place in society.

Paige is a humble young woman who seeks no limelight and truly deserve this award for her dedication to local communities and young people.

And so the runner up for the Central Bedfordshire Young Person's Award is Paige Taylor.

Winner of Young Person Award for Central Bedfordshire:

This young girl has created and published almost 1 years 'worth of magazines targeted for young people and written by young people. Her vision was to create a magazine that amplifies the voice of young people, shines a light on the positive work of young people, and informs young people about issues relevant to them. Over the past year she has achieved this aim throughout each issue of the magazine and she continues to work tirelessly to continue its publication each term.

Some of the issues discussed in the magazine have been:

- Internet Safety
- Mental Health
- Black History Month
- Tips for studying
- Exploitation and Knife Crime

Thea would like the magazine to have voices from young people throughout Central Bedfordshire so that it is truly reflective of the diversity of youth voice. However, despite little take up of contributors, Thea has continued to work hard to ensure that a good quality magazine is published every term - almost single-handedly. The magazine has proven to be quite popular amongst young people in the schools it currently reaches, and with Thea's determination its readership will continue to grow and hopefully some new collaborators will join to create a Youth Matters team.

It is for all her hard work, persistence, and vision, as well as Thea's passion to amplify young people's voices, that Simon Bailey of Central Beds Youth Parliament, has nominated **Thea Hunt** for this award.

Young Person Award for South Bedfordshire:

Nathan Bailey is just 18 yrs old but he has been volunteering for several years. He commits huge hours to volunteering each week.

He developed and is delivering, a training programme 'Looking After Your Mates' to give young people the tools to identify when their mates are getting into negative and serious behaviour, to challenge them and support them to move away from this. The Home Office has shown an interest in this project and Nathan not only spoke to them about the work but gave a presentation at a local event that was hosted by Dr Tahir Mahmood.

Rajab Ali, Nathan's nominator, tells us that Nathan also volunteers for the Reconnect Project, set up after covid, to get older and more vulnerable people who had been isolated, back into the community. Every Wednesday afternoon he sets up and serves afternoon tea, and even helps clear up afterwards!

This busy young man also finds time for the Luton SOS service, which provides a place of safety, and medical and emotional support, to members of the community. Nathan completed his first aid training and is now volunteering on this project.

And finally, Nathan gave up most of his summer holidays to train and then volunteer for the Mitalee/Diverse FM's Summer School project, and to support the work they do across Luton.

Nathan is truly a positive role model for young people, and so the **Young Person Award for South Bedfordshire** goes to **Nathan Bailey**.

Adult Awards

And now we move on to the **Adult Awards**. There was such tough competition for these awards so the High Sheriff has decided to award a High Sheriff Certificate to the **Runners Up**.

Runner up for the **Adult Award for North Bedfordshire**:

I hope you will agree, the Police Force in this county do an incredible job, putting their own safety on the line every day of their working lives. We were made palpably aware of this on Monday night when we were privileged to go out with a couple of police officers on their night shift to calls of such a varied nature where one officer got kicked hard trying to apprehend a drunk man who was threatening people with a brick and causing criminal damage, to performing a welfare check on an elderly man prompted by concerned friends. The officers were young but under the quiet, pragmatic guidance of their senior officer were all mentally prepared for the worst case scenario when they eventually managed to break in to his house. Luckily for all concerned it had a joyous outcome with the chap being found alive, if very cold and confused, and taken to hospital. But this was an easy shift by comparison to some, apparently. When we asked the officers how they coped with the more brutal shifts, and how they took care of their mental health, they said talking to their colleagues is what helps them deal with what they experience.

But what happens to them when they retire? They are able to join NARPO, the National Association of Retired Police Officers. But not all NARPOS are created equal! Under the care of George Fouhey, the secretary of of Beds NARPO for over 10 years, our retired police officers have 'lucked out', as they say! In that time, he has increased membership for this county to 740 members: many of them are widows, widowers or carers.

Seven years ago George put out an appeal to anyone who needed support in the shape of a comfort gift or visit. One member contacted him and said he was housebound (and I think lonely). Together with 2 others they took him for coffee in Bedford. After a couple of hours the chap said it had made his day. This prompted George to message members to see who might like to join for a coffee on a Wednesday. The result is that today there are over a hundred names on the list and between 20 and 30 turn up each Wednesday usually at Garden Centres. Among the regulars are 2 widowers, plus a widow, along with a husband who cares for his disabled wife. These Wednesdays lift the spirits of all who attend.

Covid did not stop George either, he arranged meetings in parks with everyone bringing chairs and flasks, to the enjoyment of all concerned.

George also keeps track of the welfare of members and with the help of others on the committee makes sure people are not forgotten. Each year he arranges for 30 widows to receive a Christmas card and M&S voucher.

They all experienced trauma in their working lives - regularly - and these weekly get togethers with other people who have had similar experiences and truly understand, must be a real life saver for many.

And so the runner up for the **Adult Award for North Bedfordshire goes to George Fouhey.**

Winner of the Adult Award for North Bedfordshire:

In the words of her nominators Ralley Rahman and Fsella, this passionate, hardworking, selfless lady has been the pillar of the community for the women of Bangladeshi heritage in the county, **and others**. She cares deeply about supporting marginalised people with unwavering zeal, whether it be modern slavery, forced marriage, domestic violence, immigration issues or racism. Lila has used the issues she has faced personally to strengthen her and shape her path in life. She is dedicated to equality for all and has supported women from **all backgrounds and cultures**, who have been in abusive relationships, initially through her work with the Queens Park Community Organisation. Through this organisation, during covid, she also packaged and delivered food parcels to the vulnerable every week.

She has been supporting Bedfordshire Police as a volunteer for over 10 years, and is now on the Chief Constable's Advisory Panel.

Most recently Lila played an integral part in producing a the first community Iftar in Harpur Square in Bedford. It brought people from all backgrounds, cultures and religions together in one area to celebrate peacefully. It was an historic moment.

She also played a major role in the production of the Bangladeshi Heritage Day with iLearn Bedford, the first of its kind. I could go on... but, in short, the winner of the **Adult Award for North Bedfordshire: is Lila Begum**

Runner up for the Adult Award for Central Bedfordshire:

Marjorie has lived in Maulden for over 40 years. She taught at Maulden Lower School and then at Stotfold until she retired as deputy head. Over the years, she has been actively involved in many aspects of the life of the village. She's a member of the WI and their bookclub, ran the Sunday school, organised holiday clubs for children, has served as churchwarden for six years, and still leads the junior choir.

Since her husband died in 2008, Marjorie has given much time to support those who live alone, whether widowed, divorced or single. She set up a group to support them called 'Stepping Out'. They meet in her home once a month for tea and chat, and organises pub lunches for them once a month too. Over the years she has collected people who cannot drive so that they too can enjoy the fellowship. A few years ago, she realised that some widowers were also feeling lonely and so was instrumental in starting 'Tea and Co'. This is a games afternoon with tea and cake again for both men and women who want company. During lockdown, she regularly telephoned those who lived alone and started a walking group when people could not meet indoors. This proved to be popular and continues to meet every Friday.

Her latest initiative is the Eco-hub shop. This is held in the small church hall and is a charity shop with a difference. It is not manned nor is there any charge so people can take what they need without feeling embarrassed. She has also organised Lent Lunches each year to support 'The Need Project' and other local charities. Marjorie is always willing to help others in whatever way she can.

And so the Runner Up for the **Adult Award for Central Bedfordshire goes to Marjorie Horrell.**

Adult Award for Central Bedfordshire:

Julie has lived in Clophill for about 60 years. She was a teacher at St Mary school for her entire career. Over the years she's been involved in every aspect of village life. She is a trustee of Clophill United Charities and hands out the welfare money at Christmas. If people cannot come to the church to collect it, she willingly delivers it to their homes. She is a founder member of Clophill Community Care, which involves taking a turn to hold a phone and arranging transport for those in need. She regularly takes people to hospital and doctors appointments. She runs an informal luncheon gathering at the Stone Jug pub to support those who live alone. Most recently Julie established The Leisure Club which meets in the Church every Thursday afternoon for games and puzzles for anyone in the village who would enjoy fellowship. Julie makes the tea and offers a friendly welcome. She is also part of the team that provides winter warmer soup lunches.

All this is commendable, but Julie's care for those in need has gone much further than this. She took in a lady who was dying and had nowhere else to live, and Julie and her husband gave her a home for several months. She is now supporting a lady with alcohol dependency and again has offered that she can stay for a while until she feels better and receives the professional help she needs.

Julie is a well respected lady who is more than willing to help anyone in need and has done far more than each of her roles require.

This year's winner of the **Adult Award for Central Bedfordshire** goes to **Julie Benson.**

Runner up for the **Adult Award for South Bedfordshire:**

Many of you will have heard of Noah, the homeless charity, which provides a practical, empowering and caring service, for those who are marginalised, excluded or have simply fallen into poverty. They provide food, clothing, medical and dental care, outreach, support and advice on accessing accommodation and income support as well as linking with specialist agencies.

Dave has been a volunteer tutor at NOAH for 23 years and runs the Woodwork club. He owns his own joinery business and is skilled in all areas of bespoke woodwork. When Dave found out about the Noah Academy in Luton and realised they were helping vulnerable people who were going through challenging times, to rebuild their confidence and enable them to contribute to society, he set up the woodwork club. Dave brings his own pick up truck with his own power tools and equipment every week for people to try. Between them, the group are able to make bird houses, shoe racks, and all manner of constructions! He creates a friendly, informal atmosphere in the group, where people can enjoy learning a new skill and feel good about what they've achieved. He's currently coaching two apprentices to help him lead the group so that they can develop confidence in their leadership. Woodwork Club has even helped NOAH to keep the building in good order, repairing doors and other structures, as part of the learning program. Paul Prosser of NOAH says 'we are proud and indebted to Dave for leveraging his practical skills, and care for others, with such a significant contribution of his time and energy towards the people at NOAH'.

The **Runner Up** for the **Adult Award for South Bedfordshire** is **Dave Richardson**

Winner of the Adult Award for South Bedfordshire:

Seven years ago, Hasina created a female only martial arts club in Luton. This gives women in Luton the opportunity to learn self defence, a combat sport, to improve their wellbeing both physically and mentally, and have a feeling of empowerment. Hasina teaches MMA, Muay Thai, karate and self defence to women of all ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds.

Hasina's passion has always been to help others and she runs the club single-handedly.

She has created a community, a sisterhood of women from all faiths, who come together to learn martial arts and self defence. By creating a female only space, women of faith in particular, have learnt life-saving skills and improved their confidence.

She has worked with Luton Council to bring free self defence classes to Luton and partnered recently with TeamBeds Luton to start a new project called Her Defence, teaching self defence sessions in local schools.

She has also published two children's books on anti-bullying and self-confidence and is a public speaker on the subject in Luton, constantly raising awareness for female empowerment and self-esteem.

She is an inspiration to women of all ages.

The **Winner** for the **Adult Award for South Bedfordshire is Hasina Rahman**

Group Awards. North Bedfordshire:

Country Days is an educational charity providing day courses in a beautiful nature reserve for young people aged 7-11 years in Bedfordshire. It is the brainchild of Ann Hadfield MBE who understood the importance of the natural environment in the lives of young people. They provide days out for children particularly who don't have such ready access to the countryside, with activities such as campfire cooking, making maps, building a base camp, archery, semaphore, pond dipping and raft building.

Megan Jones, Headteacher of Grange Academy in Kempston, a special school for children ages 5-16, nominated Country Days. She can't be here tonight sadly but wanted to send a short statement about how incredible Country Days has been for her children:

Country Days has provided an amazing opportunity for our children during the holidays. The charity has been kind enough to open a day specially for our pupils, all with special educational needs. They have made multiple accommodations for the needs of our pupils. The organisers have been so kind and enthusiastic with our pupils and have given them opportunities and experiences they wouldn't usually have such as pond dipping and making dens. All of our pupils loved their day out and talked about it for months afterwards. The children felt like they had achieved so much and it helped boost their confidence. Megan had lovely feedback from their parents about how wonderful it was for the kids to have a day out in a safe and comfortable environment. She is so excited to continue these days for our pupils. Thank you. And so the winner of the **Group Award** for **North Bedfordshire** is **Country Days**.

Group Award for Central Bedfordshire:

Dunstable Wombles are an exceptional group of individuals led by Zoe Riley with a passion for helping their community. They started in April 2021 with the aim of creating a cleaner town.

They work in pairs and collect both general waste and recycling. Between them they have given over 270 hours of volunteering and have collected over 250 bags of litter!

They have held 11 community events at various locations across Dunstable with an average turn out of 15 volunteers. And they work with local authority and community groups to support town wide initiatives, such as supporting the 'In Bloom Campaigns' in Dunstable in 2022 by ensuring the judges routes were clear of litter for both judging days!

Wonderfully, they have secured a seedcorn grant from Dunstable Town Council to help purchase 15 child-size litter picking sticks and 6 new hoops to hold rubbish sacks which are now used to support the education of our youngsters in local community around waste and littering.

Dunstable Wombles are the winners of this year's **Group Award for Central Bedfordshire.**

Group Award for South Bedfordshire.

Since Nov 2021, Luton Sikh Soup Kitchen (LSSK) have served over 10,000 meals to disadvantaged communities, and those affected by the cost of living crisis – every Sunday outside of Luton town hall – 6-7pm, come rain or shine. This humanitarian effort has been made possible due to the fantastic support offered by the business community. Since Sep 2022, **Thurlow Nunn**, spearheaded by **Paul Tavinor, Simon Reeves and Lynda Bird**, have kindly donated a **van, fully insured and fuelled for use by LSSK every Sunday**. The van has been massively helpful in ensuring the successful running of LSSK. Thurlow Nunn have also donated **food parcels**. This business philanthropy is incredibly generous and much appreciated.

4 special High Sheriff certificates to give out tonight, the first is to **Pauline Stepney**:

Pauline is the founder of the charity Legacy Of Windrush Descendants (LOWD). She has sat at several strategic partnerships and race and diversity groups, including regional and national initiatives focussing on equality and diversity. She wishes to educate people on history to help them to understand more about the way it can shape us. Pauline focuses on the welfare and well-being of all people. This is shown by her work with her Church during lockdown; her youth project, 'Rite Steps'; and the exhibitions she has helped to produce as a member of the Black History Panel at The Higgins Museum.

Next up is **iLearn Bedford** , a women's organisation founded by **Ralley Rahman**. iLearn is aimed at providing a safe space within the community for the large Bangladeshi population in Bedford and works to bridge the gap between service providers and the community.

Kingsbrook and Cauldwell, where it is based, are socially and economically deprived areas where services are limited. iLearn Bedford works to improve the quality of life for the wider community and hold regular sessions such as social ESOL lessons and exercise to overcome barriers allowing for better integration to society. Ralley, Iminah, Fahima, Jackie and many other volunteers have put in hard work and dedication to support members of the community with their wide array of needs.

Aky Hussain is the Manager of **Sainsburys Harpenden**. Luton born and bred - he and his amazing colleagues, including Rebecca Iommi, support the Luton Sikh Soup Kitchen. This humanitarian effort could only have been made possible due to the fantastic support offered by the business community. Sainsburys Harpenden have donated, on average, 150 breads and pastries every week to LSSK since the inception of the soup kitchen. This business philanthropy is incredibly generous and much appreciated, and integral to feeding communities in need.

And last but by no means least, this is for the **Ladies of the Luton Sikh Soup Kitchen**, who as we have already heard have served over 10,000 meals to disadvantaged communities, and those affected by the cost of living crisis – every Sunday outside Luton Town Hall – 6-7pm, come rain or shine. Could Professor Gurch Randhawa collect this award on their behalf, please?