

Tony Gearing, a Stradishall resident since 2010 and a governor of Wickhambrook Primary Academy, was made an MBE (Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) in the Queen's Birthday Honours on 16 June 2017. The citation reads 'For services to Young People in the UK'.



Tony's aim is to change the unfair negative image of young people in the media into a positive one and to set up the very best young people as role models for others to copy. Ultimately he would like to help create a generation of outstanding citizens.

Tony, a former national newspaper journalist who decided to do something about the bad press the media gives the younger generation, held his first Young People of the Year awards in Hertfordshire in 2005. He expanded the campaign to a dozen English counties, including Suffolk, plus London and the whole of Scotland. More than 6,000 young people have entered over 60 YOPEY competitions and more than £130,000 has been given to young people to invest in their good causes, paid for by commercial sponsors and public bodies.

The movement became known as 'YOPEY' – pronounced yop-ee – and its awards as 'Yopeys' – Oscars for young people who give to others. It became a charity in 2012 of which Tony is the chief executive.

A joint Suffolk and Norfolk Young People of the Year was held in 2009 and the following year Suffolk had its own YOPEY.

In Suffolk, Tony is now working on bringing young people together with the oldest generation. He has developed 'YOPEY Befriender', where young people are recruited from schools to volunteer to visit lonely elderly people in care homes, many of them with dementia.



He is currently running, among others nationwide, two YOPEY Befriender schemes in Suffolk – in Bury St Edmunds between County Upper and St Benedict's schools and a 100 per cent dementia care home, and in Sudbury between Ormiston Sudbury Academy and The Thomas Gainsborough School with a nursing care home, where coincidentally his mother, from Glemsford, is a resident, having had a stroke. He has started work on a third Suffolk YOPEY Befriender scheme in Mildenhall.

“I haven’t achieved this alone,” said Tony. “This MBE is for all the young people who have taken part in YOPEYs. They are all winners!”

“It is also for all the friends I roped in to help and for my wife Jo who keeps my nose to the grindstone and gives me some of my best ideas.”

The Lord-Lieutenant of Suffolk, the Countess of Euston, has written to congratulate Tony. “You created the Young People of the Year which serves to highlight exceptional young people in order to improve the overall image of young and to give the younger generation real and inspirational role models to aspire to.

“I must commend you on your YOPEY Befriender scheme which is an extremely effective way to connect the generations and combat loneliness among the elderly.”

William Kendall DL, who was High Sheriff of Suffolk for 2016-17 and visited the Sudbury YOPEY Befriender scheme, said: “I was so impressed by the genuinely warm relationships the young people had developed with their elderly new friends.



“Tony is to be congratulated. These national honours are only given to people who have provided outstanding service.”

The Gearing family, of Woodfarm Cottage, Bury Road – including boys Nathaniel, 8, and Noah, 7, who are pupils at Wickhambrook Primary Academy – will be going to a royal palace between October and the new year. “It is all very exciting,” said Jo.

Tony also has two grown-up children by his previous marriage. Saskia is a teacher in Haverhill and Callum works in the Home Office.

Tony is interested in hearing from other care homes that would like to make a donation to the YOPEY charity in return for having a YOPEY Befriender scheme. He would also like to hear from businesses that would like to sponsor a revival of Suffolk Young People of the Year. The campaign could be named after the sponsors and would raise their public profiles.

The UK Government’s website says an MBE is “awarded for an outstanding achievement or service to the community. This will have had a long-term, significant impact and stand out as an example to others”.

For more information visit yopey.org



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Antony S Gearing was made an MBE 'for services to Young People in the UK' in the Queen's Birthday Honours, June 2017

Tony, YOPEY and YOPEY Befrienders have also won: Community Champion, Stars of Suffolk 2016; top prize in the first Aviva Community Fund, 2015; High Sheriff awards – Suffolk 2017, London 2016, Bedfordshire 2008.

<http://www.youngpeopleoftheyear.org> where you'll find fantastic young people

<http://www.facebook.com/YOPEY> where you'll find YOPEY's Facebook family

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100011503156865> where you'll find news about YOPEY Befriender

<https://twitter.com/YopeyCharity> where you'll find our tweets

We are also on YouTube (YOPEYYT) Instagram (yopeytony and Mrs YOPEY) and Pinterest (Mrs YOPEY)

YOPEY registered with the Charity Commission of England and Wales as charity number 1145573

Registered with the Registrar of Companies for England and Wales as company number 7751145

Registered address: Woodfarm Cottage, Bury Road, Stradishall, Newmarket CB8 8YN