

# New home helped me to stay off drugs

**Alison Cairns** was homeless and addicted to drugs. But local churchgoers stepped in to offer her a home and transform her life

ALISON Cairns was homeless and addicted to hard drugs. She turned her life around with the help of staff and volunteers from Hope Into Action Portsmouth.

The 54-year-old had been taking drugs for 30 years and was hooked on heroin and crack. She was homeless and had been sleeping at Hope House, a hostel in Portsmouth. Worse was to follow when her partner for the past 40 years tragically died on Fathers' Day last year.

But someone told her about Hope Into Action, the charity that enables local churches to provide real homes and genuine friendship to those who are homeless.



Alison Cairns: her life has been transformed

Alison stopped taking drugs and moved into a house last summer, supported by worshippers at St Mary's Church in Fratton. She now has her own bedroom and living room and shares a kitchen and bathroom with another tenant.

It means her four children and two grandchildren can visit her there. Her daughter now trusts her to look after her grandson, and she can even afford to buy him treats. She



Enabling churches to house the homeless

"I was in Hope House for six months, and had been doing drugs for 30 years," said Alison. "I had hit rock bottom and decided to stop taking drugs.

"I had started to go to Cocaine Anonymous (CA) meetings, which help people to give up, and I met

couldn't have managed this without the support from Hope Into Action and others.

someone there who told me about Hope Into Action.

"I met Caroline Deans from Hope Into Action and she told me that to become a tenant I needed to have a few more weeks of being clean under my belt. She told me she didn't want to put me in a house too soon where I'd be at risk of eviction if I relapsed.

"So I kept working hard at my addiction recovery and in August last year, I moved into this house which I share with a younger woman.



Alison Cairns with Hope Into Action worker Caroline Deans

"It wasn't easy, as my partner – who is also the father of my four children – died on Fathers' Day last June. We'd been together since I was 15, and he had been a drug user too. But I used his death as an incentive to stay away from drugs.

"Living in a Hope Into Action house has made a huge difference, as I feel really secure there. My family can visit, which they couldn't do when I was homeless or in Hope House. It means I can have a relationship back with my kids, who didn't really want to see me before.

"My daughter now trusts me to look after my four-year-old grandson while she's at work. I can cook with

him, and go to the shop with him to buy things and spoil him. I couldn't afford to do that before – I was shoplifting to fund my habit.

## 'My daughter trusts me to look after my four-year-old grandson'

"And the church has a support group that helps me. I meet Marilyn each week and sometimes go to the church's social events. It's really important to talk things through with supportive people.

"If I have thoughts about using in

my head, I can ring my CA sponsor. And I'm also supported by the CA meetings, and at the Fast Track group run by the Society of St James's Recovery Hub.

"Since living in the Hope Into Action house, I've also come off Espranon – which is a drug similar to methadone that helps people withdraw from opiates over a period of time.

"I just wanted to say a big thank you, as this means so much. It's made a massive difference for me to have a house, and I've even started praying a little.

"I had been baptised as a baby, then I lost my faith when I was in addiction. But even though I gave up on God, he never gave up on me."

Alison was recently given an award at this year's national Hope Into Action conference, to recognise her progress and her recovery. She has already inspired others on the Fast Track group, run by the Society of St James, to kick their drug habits, and is interested in working to help addicts on Intuitive Thinking courses towards recovery.

## Local charity helps to transform dozens of lives

The charity Hope Into Action UK was initially launched in 2010, and works with churches to help them provide housing and support for homeless people.

Worshippers from partner churches can club together and invest in a house, which can then be offered to tenants, including ex-offenders, survivors of domestic abuse, people who've worked in the sex industry and recovering addicts.

A small group from the church also offers regular support and friendship.

The idea is not just to help people rebuild their lives, but also to empower congregations –

emphasising that they can make a difference to society, and be blessed through the relationships they have with tenants.

Meanwhile, the tenants feel valued and motivated to change, as they work towards financial, health, work and relationships goals, get used to paying rent and integrating with their community.

The Portsmouth franchise opened their first Hope Into Action home in 2019. Churches across this area have already provided 11 houses worth more than £3m, which have now housed a total of 52 people. Currently there are 30 tenants supported by nine

different congregations.

Among the parishes involved are St Mary's Fratton, St Jude's Southsea, St Mary's Portchester and St James in Emsworth, where the congregation already supports tenants in one Hope Into Action house, and worshippers are buying a second home which will be available to tenants soon.

To find out more about the work of Hope Into Action Portsmouth, or to donate to their work, see: [www.portsmouth.hopeintoaction.org.uk](http://www.portsmouth.hopeintoaction.org.uk).

You can also find out how your church, or you as an individual, can become involved as a partner, volunteer or a trustee.