

Worshippers from St John's, Rowlands Castle, provide home furnishings for their tenants

Providing a real home can transform lives

Christians here have found ways to help homeless and vulnerable people – by giving them a home and some practical support

HAVE you ever wondered how you could help to transform the lives of those who are homeless, battling addictions or who have been in prison?

Across our nation, there will be more than 4,000 rough sleepers each night, 155 women turned away from refuges each week, and 6,000 ex-offenders leaving prison each month. Around 58,000 people a year experience homelessness, substance misuse and offending each year.

Our churches are often good at helping those in need, but it's harder to help an individual to make the difficult transition back into mainstream society.

The Christian charity Hope into Action aims to transform people's life chances by providing a proper home for them to live in, as well as caring volunteers to support them and pray for them.

Worshippers can club together to buy a new home as an investment and lease it to Hope into Action. Or a private investor can offer a house they own. Either way, church members then provide practical support, build relationships and mentor the tenants who move in.

In Portsmouth, five different churches have already provided homes for those who are trying to rebuild their lives. St Mary's in Fratton is the latest, joining St Jude's, Southsea, North End Baptist Church, Langstone Church and Cosham Baptist Church.

And our previous publication, the *Pompey Chimes*, reported in 2017 on the first Hope into Action house opened in our diocese – supported by St John's, Rowlands

Castle – which welcomed asylum seekers.

By providing a proper home, rather than just some basic accommodation, the idea is to give tenants the stability and support to tackle the issues they face in their lives.



Enabling churches to house the homeless

And it's making a real difference. One of the first tenants in Portsmouth, Matt,

was struggling with gambling and drug addictions and was estranged from his family.

He moved into the house supported by worshippers at St Jude's Church, dealt with his issues, restarted work as a gas fitter and has been reunited with his family. He's now moved out of the Hope into Action home,

'This support helped me to stay clean and see my daughter'

HE had wrestled with drug and alcohol addiction for almost 30 years – until Hope into Action gave him somewhere to call home.

Ray Kattenhorn spent time unemployed, homeless and in prison because of his addictions, and hadn't seen his daughter for 17 years. He decided to get clean and asked to be a tenant in a Hope into Action house.

Now the 45-year-old has been off drink and drugs for 12 months. And not only has he had an emotional reunion with his daughter, but he's also met his baby grandson for the first time. And he wants to thank those who enabled him to turn his life around.

"From what I know about this charity, it is amazing," he said. "I had wanted to change, but my head had never been in the right place. This is the longest I've been clean for a long time and the most positive I've ever felt.

"It's not just having a house to live in, but also the support that you get. I've tried other things in the past, but it's not been like this. Being able to see my daughter and grandson makes all the difference. She called me 'dad' for the first time since she was seven."

Ray grew up in Portsmouth and started smoking drugs at the age of 15. He had held down jobs only as long as his addictions would allow, and spent time in bedsits, homeless hostels and in prison. He had tried recovery and rehab, but it had rarely worked for long.

When he lost his most recent job last year, he moved back in with his mum. He had a further drugs relapse, so she kicked him out and he was homeless for three or four weeks. But his mum knew



Ray Kattenhorn: appreciates the support

people involved in Hope into Action and suggested it.

He was accepted onto the scheme and moved into a house supported by worshippers from St Jude's Church, Southsea. He is one of two tenants there, and a team from the church helped furnish the house and got to know them. Among other things, a volunteer sees him each week.

"It has made a massive difference to have a proper home," he said. "It has helped me to recover properly. Someone meets me for a walk by the sea every Thursday, and that's helped to keep me on the straight and narrow.

"One thing I do like is that there is no pressure. In the past, I've been too quick to go back into work and then had a relapse. This time I'm taking my time to get my head in the right place.

"One of my motivations was seeing my daughter again. I

hadn't seen her for 17 years and she now has a little boy. I didn't even like to talk about her because it hurt so much, and I know she couldn't call me her dad.

"But I started to message her and opened up about what I was going through and how I was feeling. My mum arranged for us to meet at her house, and I was actually physically sick the night before because I was so worried.

"When I came through the door, my mum said 'Give her a hug', but I froze – and so did my daughter. But we relaxed and were able to chat. And I got to meet my grandson, who is 17 months old, for the first time. We got to talk about meaningful things – and we've made a connection in that we're both watching Love Island!

"Seeing her was the main reason I wanted to get better, and I'm so glad it has happened."