

allowing space for someone else to move in.

The chair of trustees for Hope into Action Portsmouth, the Rev Tracey Ansell, is minister at North End Baptist Church. She now works alongside four members of staff who support churches and tenants.

‘This transforms the Church as well as transforming people’s lives’

She said: “This transforms the Church as well as transforming people’s lives. It means Christians are intimately involved in the lives of people who they get to know as friends, mentoring them, praying for them and walking alongside them as they put their lives together – and that has an effect on us as Christians as well.

“God is doing something powerful in Portsmouth and it’s making a real difference in the city. The five houses that have been bought amount to more than £1m of investment, which has so far helped 11 tenants. We dream of every church in the city being involved, which would make an even bigger difference.”

Hope into Action was launched in 2010 by Ed and Rachel Walker, who provided the first of these homes in Peterborough.

They were prompted to act after meeting an ex-offender who had no family or friends to help him, and faced spiralling back into the same cycle of addiction and crime. There are now 40 such homes across the country.

Ed identified three things that would make a difference in the lives of those who are homeless or

A moving moment as house keys handed over for the first time

IT was a moving moment when the group from St Mary’s Church, Fratton, gave their first tenant the keys to her new home.

Those who move into Hope into Action houses often have a history of not being valued. So it can be overwhelming for them to see the care and attention that has gone into decorating, furnishing and adding thoughtful touches to what will be their new home.

The Rev Sam Cullen, associate priest at St Mary’s, certainly found it deeply moving. The team from her parish had spent two days painting, gardening, cleaning and furnishing the two-bedroomed house. They’d also raised £1,000 so they could buy pictures for the walls, kitchen utensils, crockery, towels, duvets and so on.

So when the first tenant moved in, this July, and when the second followed, in August, it was incredibly rewarding to see their reactions.

“I think the kindness that they saw was almost overwhelming



The team from St Mary’s Church, Fratton, help to prepare the house (left to right): Shelly Leggat, Hope into Action empowerment worker Caroline Deans, associate priest the Rev Sam Cullen, Irene James and the Rev Giles Harris-Evans

for them,” she said. “It felt almost like a holy moment, and to sit there and listen to their stories was deeply moving. God is at work in Hope into Action, and that kind of love without judgement is exactly what it means to live out the gospel. “And continuing to support

the tenants is highly sensitive work, but it is very rewarding. These people have reached a point where they want to turn their lives around, and having this kind of support allows them to do so. We can value them as people, and also value the contribution that they can make as well.”

have just left prison: somewhere to live, someone to love – and to love them – and something significant to do. Giving an ex-offender a home reduces the likelihood of them re-offending by 80 per cent. Hope into Action also encourages tenants to use their time volunteering, training or in employment.

They welcome people of all faiths, ethnicities and sexualities as tenants, and are also unashamedly Christian in their ethos.

Worshippers offer to pray with their tenants and are happy to

welcome them to come to church, but there is no pressure to do so.

Those who choose to invest their own money towards buying a Hope into Action home receive a regular two per cent interest payment, and the assurance that they’ll also receive a share of the proceeds when that home is sold. The vision behind the charity is to mobilise funds that might otherwise be languishing in low-yield savings accounts to do something positive.

For more information, see www.hopeintoaction.org.uk and www.portsmouth.hopeintoaction.org.uk



Shelly Leggat and Maria Sadler with a car full of home furnishings for the Hope into Action house supported by St Mary’s, Fratton

An investor supplied the funding for Hope into Action to buy the house that is being supported by the group from St Mary’s Church.

The parish wanted to focus on supporting women who are have survived domestic abuse, so their two tenants come from a traumatic and abusive background.

The parish recruited a team of six volunteers, who would work on the house and provide support afterwards. Only those people know its address, to ensure the safety of the tenants. The group was given training via Zoom, so they would understand their role clearly.

Worshippers also raised the money to buy items for the house via a recipe book and a reindeer

drive last Christmas. And they bought new, high-quality home furnishings, to reinforce how much they value the tenants. One of the local branches of Tesco also offered brand new household items, as part of its community outreach.

And as well as furnishing and decorating, the support team also provided flowers, chocolates, a welcome card and a Bible as housewarming gifts.

Because the tenants are women, they are being supported by women from the group. The volunteer and tenant decide between themselves how regularly to meet up and chat, as they develop their relationship. Subsequent tenants may be supported by others, depending on what makes a good match.

Islanders help homeless women

THESE are just two of the 10 women who have been helped so far by Hope into Action on the Isle of Wight.

Roo (left) and Helen are the current tenants in the home provided by the charity on the island. It has chosen to focus on giving homes to women who have been made homeless.

Of the eight previous tenants they’ve housed in the

past five years, seven have now moved onto living independently.

Geraldine Gardner works as the charity’s empowerment worker on the island, based at Aspire Ryde. And four volunteers from local churches support the tenants and pray for the project.

The links with Aspire – based at the former Holy Trinity Church – means there is a ready-made

community to help with decorating and gardening.

Geraldine said: “Recently I took Roo and Helen for lunch at Carisbrooke Priory, which was so special. It was a breakthrough after nearly a year of being isolated through Covid lockdowns.

“To have a home, a place to lay your head, and real support is the beginning of real change for these women.”

