

# Help give them real fresh start

**CHRISTIANS around Portsmouth can make this Christmas a happier one for homeless people and asylum seekers.**

Their efforts may also give such people a fresh start during the rest of the year under a new project.

Churches Homeless Action (CHA) - an ecumenical Portsmouth group that aims to keep such issues on the Church's agenda - has launched its annual Christmas appeal for gift vouchers for the homeless.

The scheme encourages worshippers to buy gift vouchers from shops such as Tesco, Argos and Boots and slip them inside a Christmas card which they sign. Disadvantaged people can then use the vouchers to buy themselves the Christmas present they really want.

Last year's scheme saw £8,000-worth of vouchers and 750 cards handed over to agencies who then distributed them to the homeless, asylum seekers and women in refuges. For many, it was the only Christmas gift they received.

This year, the agencies have suggested that the scheme should be extended. Any extra vouchers collected will now be available to disadvantaged people who want to find a place of their own. It will be called the Fresh Start scheme.

Graham Bromley, finance director of Portsmouth Housing Association, said: "Fresh Start means exactly what its name suggests. Clients seen by the agencies come from a variety of different backgrounds and circumstances

which have left them in great need.

"As they begin to find their feet and get their lives back to some semblance of normality, there are often many things that they need to buy that we all take for granted.

"Providing them with a few vouchers will help them in that process as well as providing a gesture of love and support."

The nine agencies involved this year include Portsmouth's Women's Refuge, the EC Roberts Centre, the Haslar Visitors' Group and the Hub Club at St Simon's Church in Southsea.

Worshippers from Portsmouth, Havant, Fareham and Gosport will be asked to bring signed cards and vouchers to their parish churches. They could also be sent directly to Paul Brier, Portsmouth Housing Association, Freepost PT987, 247

Fratton Road, Portsmouth, PO1 1BR by December 12.

The vouchers will then be handed over to the agencies at a service at St Mary's Church, Fratton Road, Fratton at 11.30am on December 19. For more information, contact Canon Bob White on 023-9282 2687.

● CHA is also holding its annual day-long seminar at St Mary's Church, Fratton, on the issue of homelessness on Saturday 24 January - the day before Homelessness Sunday.

This year's national theme is 'Building Justice - Yes We Can!'. It will start at 10am and end with a soup lunch at 1pm.

The morning will give people the chance to explore issues of injustice and explore ways to tackle them in partnership with other agencies. For details, contact Canon Bob White on 023-9282 2687.



Participants take part in the circle dancing event in Portsmouth Cathedral

## Creativity evident in creation dance

IT was a chance to experience the creation story in a new way - in dance.

Around 40 people were taken through the Genesis account of the creation story in a day-long workshop at Portsmouth Cathedral.

The 'Celebration of Creation and Creativity' involved using circle dances, traditional dance from around the world and some more recent dance steps. Among those used were a 'dandelion dance'

and a 'dance for trees', as the creation of plants was recalled.

The celebration of each day of creation began with a Bible reading of God's creative activity that day.

Participants also exercised their own creative powers by modelling those things God had created in small lumps of plasticine.

Donations from those involved also helped pay for 50 sweet chestnut saplings for a Welsh woodland regeneration project.

## Elizabeth wins card contest

THIS is the Christmas card that will be posted through the letterboxes of 5,000 homes in Horndean, Clanfield and Catherington this month.

Twelve-year-old Elizabeth Durbin, of St Edmund's RC Church, Horndean, won the competition to design a Christmas card that would represent all the churches in the area.

This design by the Oaklands School pupil was chosen as the overall winner out of four winning entries in different categories.

The cards will also include invitations to Christmas services at all the churches involved with Churches Together in Horndean and Clanfield.

They include the Anglican parishes of Blendworth, Chalton,



The winning Christmas card design by Elizabeth Durbin

Idsworth, Catherington and Clanfield as well as St Edmund's RC, Clanfield Baptist, Horndean Baptist and Horndean Methodist Churches.

Among the highlights in the festive programme is carols around the Christmas tree outside All Saints' Church, Catherington, at 6.30pm on Saturday 6 December with Blendworth Brass Band. Carols by Candlelight takes place at the same church at 6pm on Sunday 21 December.

The choir from St Wilfrid's Church, Cowplain, will visit Holy Trinity Church, Blendworth, at 6pm on Sunday 14 December to sing John Innes' *Glory to the Newborn King*.

Traditional carol services featuring nine lessons and carols will be at 9.30am at St Hubert's, Idsworth, 11am at Holy Trinity, Blendworth, and 6pm at St Michael and All Angels, Chalton - all on Sunday 21 December.

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