

# Restoring hope and dignity in city

**CHRISTIANS, by definition, are followers of Christ, and Jesus modelled a way of life which we try to mirror.**

When he visited a city or town, he left in his wake lives deeply impacted by his compassion and he restored hope and dignity to all who encountered him. So it should be with us.

Having just completed a report into the work of churches in Portsmouth, I know Christians are making a huge difference in this community. Normal people, impacted by the love of God, are sharing that love in practical and tangible ways with neighbours and friends.

The report was part of my work as community initiatives developer for the Shaftesbury Society, a national Christian charity working for inclusion and justice in England. 'hidden treasure' (pictured right) is the result of a survey carried out between July 2003 and March 2004. Sixty per cent of the 73 churches I

## the BIG issue



by Naomi Shaw, community initiatives developer for The Shaftesbury Society in Portsmouth

**The Big Issue examines social, moral or spiritual concerns. This month: how are our churches making a difference in Portsmouth?**

approached participated.

The aims were to raise awareness of the scale and scope of the contribution of churches to the local community; identify common themes; share information and skills; and encourage churches in the work they are doing. I understand that this is also part of the thinking behind your bishop's Kairos process.

Within the city of Portsmouth are some of the most deprived areas in the country. Alongside the many services provided by a range of agencies across the city, Portsmouth's Christian

churches are helping to address some of the needs.

Forty-four churches are running 98 projects, representing 188 different services to the local community. Those 98 projects employ 70 paid staff, with more than 500 voluntary workers. And many of these projects are financed by Christians themselves – only a small percentage of church-led projects receive funding from grants or fund-raising.

Among the services offered are projects and activities for young families, children and older people. The largest category was

that of training, advice and support for specific groups including disabled people or asylum seekers. There were also a significant number of adult cafes, drop-in schemes and social clubs. Several churches ran annual church-led events, including fayres, holiday clubs, conferences and summer camps.

Among the case studies in the report is the HOPE (Helping Other People Excel) project, which started in September 2002 at King's Church in Somers Town. It was extended in March 2003 to Portsea.

It is funded by the Children's Fund and involves visiting the homes of more than 300 children each week; helping to resolve conflict in school playgrounds; and a mentoring programme for young people.

Another case study is the Hub Club run by St Simon's Church, where homeless people and those with men-

tal illnesses receive a hot meal three times a week. This is a good example of a church-run project that allows vulnerable people the chance to enjoy a sense of community and friendship.

In fact, behind the many traditional and often austere-looking exteriors of church buildings is a bustle of activity. It is fuelled by the commitment and enthusiasm of an army of workers, ranging from user-volunteers to trained professionals, often unpaid and unnoticed.

Church leaders would agree, however, that they would like to see greater change in people's lives and throughout their communities. This would mean focusing on tackling some of the underlying issues that cause poverty, injustice and pain, as well as continuing to offer community provision.

There are three ways of engaging with the local

community:

- community provision: providing caring services or activities for those who want them – the church is very good at this!

- community action: collaborating more directly with local people/organisations to plan and deliver caring services together in some way; and

- community development: working to enable local people to take responsibility for and act in response to perceived local social needs or issues.

I would like to encourage churches to explore the latter two areas in greater depth, to add value to the work already being done. This would mean the church exploring ways to enable people and communities to shape their own future. If you have ideas about how to do so, do let me know!

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That may be true but talking to us could help you communicate more effectively

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