

Helping to make our streets safer

A NEW project to make Portsmouth's streets safer for late-night revellers will be launched by worshippers this summer.

Christians will volunteer to patrol outside pubs and clubs as 'Street Pastors' – demonstrating God's love by offering practical help to vulnerable people, making sure they get home safely and getting alongside those threatening anti-social behaviour.

Teams of four, each wearing jackets and baseball caps emblazoned with the words 'Street Pastor', will complement existing patrols of police officers between 10pm and 4am every Friday night.

They will help those who have drunk too much or got into fights by calling taxis, walking people home, administering basic first aid or simply chatting.

Street Pastors is a national initiative that started in Brixton in 2003 as a Christian response to rising levels of late-night street crime.

It now has teams in 10 different London boroughs, as well as Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds and other cities across the UK. Churches, the police and local authorities work together on the project. And it works – street crime is down by 74 per cent in Peckham on Street Pastor nights.

Church leaders from St Simon's, Southsea, the Oasis Centre, Portsmouth Christian



Street pastors will patrol our city centre offering practical help to late-night revellers

Fellowship, the Salvation Army and Kings Church, spent a year preparing to bring the concept to Portsmouth.

They have now appointed a Street Pastors co-ordinator – Elly Mulvany – who will be based at the Oasis Centre on Arundel Street.

"The vision is to take God's unconditional love onto the streets," she said. "Street pastors are easily identifiable and young people are often interested in why they are doing it – and are especially impressed that they aren't paid. People are often quite emotional if they have been drinking, and may be quite vulnerable.

"We'll offer practical assis-



tance such as making sure they get home, cleaning them up if there's been a fight, or intervening to make sure an argument doesn't escalate.

"If appropriate, we might offer to pray with them there and then, or they can write a request down for us to pray for later. But the aim isn't to preach at anyone. The national statistics show that it makes the streets safer.

"It's all about building relationships and getting alongside people. We'll be talking to pub landlords and nightclub managers during the day, and bounc-

ers on the night. And it has the enthusiastic support of local police officers."

She aims to visit churches to recruit volunteers this month, before a recruitment evening on March 11. Recruits will go through a 12-session training programme starting on April 21, when they will learn about assessing the risks of intervention, alcohol and drug issues and safety on the streets.

The project was part of the Portsmouth deanery's Kairos plans to engage more effectively with young people.

Funding has come from our diocese's Kairos pump-priming fund, a Christian organisation called Seedbed, Hampshire Constabulary and the churches involved.

Worshippers can volunteer to patrol the streets once a month, to pray for the teams while they do so – either at the Oasis Centre or at home – or to get involved in fundraising. Churches can even sponsor individual street pastors.

Those who patrol the streets need to be over 18, to have regularly attended church for a year, to get a reference from their church leader and to complete the 12-week training course.

For more information, see www.streetpastors.org.uk. To volunteer, contact Elly on 07809-627770 or portsmouth@streetpastors.org.uk

New co-ordinator felt called to job

ELLY Mulvany (pictured right) is a 46-year-old mum who has plenty of experience of roaming Portsmouth's streets at night.

For the past two years, she's been part of the team of Christians who regularly bring food and drink to homeless people in the city – the so-called 'Pot Noodle' run.

Until last summer, she also had direct experience of working with young people, as team leader for the advisory organisation Connexions.

She only made a Christian

commitment herself around four years ago during an Alpha course at St Simon's in Southsea. And she was among eight people from that Alpha course who were baptised there afterwards.

Most recently, she has been studying applied theology on a distance learning course with Moorlands Bible College.



Now she'll combine that study with working three days a week with Street Pastors.

"I was already on the Street Pastors steering group, but it was only when I went on the college course that I felt strongly that this co-ordinator's role was a job God was calling me to," she said.