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One of the hardest things about the housing system is that it's confusing. Many people don't know their rights, which means that they can lose money, put up with unacceptable housing situations, or even end up being evicted without good reason.

Adeola Ogunade saw this first-hand working as a Housing Resettlement Officer with the probation service. She thought that she could do more to help people in this situation, so she got together a group of people – from her church and beyond – who also had experience with the housing system. She started the Hope4All housing surgery, providing free training and support on housing issues.

Adeola summed up their ethos – 'the application of knowledge is power'. They try to prevent people from getting into housing difficulty by giving them the knowledge they need before it becomes a major issue.

They start with what people should look for when they're moving in – a deposit protection scheme and a gas safety certificate, for example. They also explain to people how the eviction process work. Many people don't know that you shouldn't move out within the notice period given to you by your landlord; you only legally need to leave once the landlord has been granted a court order at the end of this period. Not knowing this can lead to people being homeless unnecessarily, especially if they feel scared or intimidated by their landlord.

Hope4All also provides support to people who are in a dispute with their landlord. For example, at the beginning of the first lockdown in 2020, someone approached them because they were asked to leave their home. They didn't realise that there was an eviction ban. That tenant is now still in this house, because once the landlord knew that they understood their rights, they backed off.

They want to reach as many people as possible, so rather than trying to do everything themselves, they now work by training church leaders and volunteers so that they can train their members and local communities, spreading knowledge as far as possible. They've now reached over five hundred people.

After five years, they're ready to expand even further. They recently won Project Lab 2020, a competition run by the Cinnamon Network in partnership with the Archbishops' Housing Commission, Andrew Charitable Trust and the Mercers' Company. They won a £30,000 development grant and a place on the Project Lab Incubator, which will help them to grow and replicate what they're doing. The hope is that many more churches will be able to equip their communities to be resilient in the housing crisis.

Churches are such a powerful network for spreading important information and support, and the Archbishops' Commission on Housing, Church and Community is keen to see churches playing a bigger role in supporting people in housing need. With financial help and advice, we're excited to see how Hope4All can continue expanding over the next few years.

Notes:

Hope4All is part of the wider Hands of Hope Foundation.

2. To begin with, Hope4All and the Hands of Hope Foundation relied on individual donations and the determination of their volunteers. In 2018, they got a grant to expand their work.

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